

**Sanctity in the
North: Saints,
Lives, and Cults
in Medieval**

Thomas DuBois

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SANCTITY IN THE NORTH

SAINTS, LIVES, AND CULTS IN

MEDIEVAL
SCANDINAVIA

Sanctity in the North

SAINTS, LIVES, AND CULTS IN MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA

With original translations of primary texts and articles by leading researchers in the field, *Sanctity in the North* gives an introduction to the literary production associated with the cult of the saints in medieval Scandinavia.

For more than five hundred years, Nordic clerics and laity venerated a host of saints through liturgical celebrations, written manuscripts, visual arts, and oral traditions. Textual evidence of this widespread and important aspect of medieval spirituality abounds. Written biographies (or *vitae*), compendia of witnessed miracles, mass propers, homilies, sagas and chronicles, dramatic scripts, hymns, and ballads are among the region's surviving medieval manuscripts and early published books.

Sanctity in the North features English translations of texts from Latin or vernacular Nordic languages, in many cases for the first time. The accompanying essays concerning the texts, saints, cults, and history of the period complement the translations and reflect the contributors' own disciplinary groundings in folklore, philology, medieval, and religious studies.

(Toronto Old Norse and Icelandic Series)

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Sanctity in the North

SAINTS, LIVES, AND CULTS IN MEDIEVAL
SCANDINAVIA

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Preface

Scandinavia is more famous for its pagan era than for its Christian. Or so it can seem. Many colleges and universities in North America offer courses on Scandinavian mythology, but few offer instruction on the many centuries of Christian lore that the region produced between the era of conversions (the end of the first millennium) and the Reformation. Even when literature from this period is taught (and the Icelandic sagas certainly do receive coverage), the focus is often on the most secular aspects of the narratives, or on the most pre-Christian of elements. Texts that retell or reshape prime narratives from the Christian world or evince an overtly Christian perspective have received decidedly less attention from scholars and students, apparently because these seem somehow less distinctively Nordic. One finds more about Óðinn than St Olaf, more on Thor than St Þorlákr, more on Viking battles than on monastic foundations.

The present text seeks to remedy this situation by offering translations and analyses of works that were vitally linked to the Christian ethos of the Middle Ages: biographies, ballads, lists of miracles, and plays connected with the cult of the saints. The contributors to this volume hope that this work will help further research and interest in this important component of the artistic and spiritual life of the medieval North.

As editor of this work, I would like to thank the contributors for their enthusiasm and erudition and for their input and help at various stages of the project. I would also like to thank Suzanne Rancourt, Humanities Editor at the University of Toronto Press, for her enthusiasm for the volume, and the two outside referees for their valuable advice that strengthened the study. Mike Lange served diligently and with good humour as the editorial assistant for the work, and devoted tremendous time and care to the project. Thanks are also due to the Vilas Associates program of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which helped finance the publication and facilitated the inclusion of the various photographs that accompany the chapters. All of the above-named deserve my deepest thanks and my apologies for any shortcomings in the resulting work.

A note of the spelling conventions used in this text. Wherever possible, the authors of the articles have opted to use the spellings for saints' names standard in the countries with which the saint is most closely associated. For Iceland, that means that the Old Norse spellings are used, thus Þorlákr rather than the anglicized *Thorlac* (or the

modern Icelandic Þorlákur). On the other hand, the Norwegian King St Olaf is referred to with the modern Norwegian spelling of this name. King St Eric is spelled with a *c* in accord with general Swedish practice when referring to the saint, and the Danish King St Knud is spelled in the Danish fashion rather than *Cnut*, *Cnud*, or *Canute*. We regret the resulting inconsistencies this editorial decision has occasioned; we believe this was the best compromise in a complicated situation.

This volume is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Birgit Baldwin (1960–88), who no doubt would have contributed brilliantly to it had she had the chance.

Thomas A. DuBois
Madison, Wisconsin

Sanctity in the North

SAINTS, LIVES, AND CULTS IN MEDIEVAL
SCANDINAVIA

Introduction

THOMAS A. DUBOIS

For then I will change and purify

The lips of the peoples,
That they all may call upon the name of the LORD,
To serve him with one accord;
From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
And as far as the recesses of the North,
They shall bring me offerings.

(Zephaniah 3: 9–10)

This volume introduces the literary production associated with the cult of the saints in medieval Scandinavia. For more than five hundred years, Nordic clerics and laity venerated the rich trove of local and international saints known to them from liturgical celebrations, written manuscripts, visual arts, and oral tradition. The textual evidence of this widespread aspect of medieval spirituality abounds. Written biographies (*vitae*), compendia of witnessed miracles, mass propers, homilies, sagas and chronicles, dramatic scripts, hymns, and ballads all exist in plentitude in the pages of the region's surviving medieval manuscripts. Undoubtedly, far more such material existed in the past that has now been lost. The present volume assembles a selection of such extant materials and translates them into English from Latin or vernacular Nordic languages, in many cases for the first time. In order to shed further light on these works, the scholars involved in this project have also written essays concerning the texts, saints, cults, or history connected with their selections. These essays reflect the contributors' own disciplinary groundings, from folkloristics to philology, and from medieval studies to religious studies. In aggregate, the essays reflect the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary hagiographic research. It is also hoped that these essays and translated selections will draw greater scholarly attention to this comparatively little-studied area of Nordic literary history, while making Nordic materials better known to scholars of pre-Reformation European Christianity.

The Arrival of Christianity

The Catholic era of Scandinavian history, beginning with sporadic missionization in the eighth century and coming to a close in the tumult of the Reformation, represents a long and important period in the formation of the societies that we today recognize as Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. During this long period – more than half a millennium – Scandinavians changed faiths, losing their reputation abroad as fierce pagan Vikings and developing institutions and a religiosity that paralleled that of the rest of Europe. Their outlooks and experiences are preserved for us today through a rich array of texts, some continental in origin, others distinctively local, which reflect the complex and subtle ways in which Nordic peoples assimilated and embraced a new religion.

In converting to Christianity, Scandinavians of the conversion era set aside an ancient, familiar and still functional world view for a mysterious religion from the south. Rooted in the ethnic customs of a thoroughly foreign climate and locale, possessed of teachings and rituals unlike anything previously held in the North, and promoted in the region by a combination of foreign state-craft and missionary zeal, Christianity arrived as a puzzling but ultimately triumphant import. Ari Þorgilsson's famous account of the peaceful conversion of Iceland in the year 1000 may represent in part the wishful thinking of a twelfth-century cleric, yet it also clearly contains a kernel of truth. In his history of the event, written somewhat more than a century after the fact, Ari relates the efforts of a growing Christian minority in Iceland, people emboldened by the success of their faith elsewhere in Scandinavia and backed by the forceful and determined Norwegian King Olaf Tryggvason. At the annual assembly (Althing) of the year 1000 (999 by modern calendars), the Christians push for full recognition of their faith and provoke a conflict by composing a scurrilous verse about one of the Norse goddesses. In response, the presiding chieftain of the assembly, the law-sayer (*lögsögumaður*) Þorgeirr, retires to a secluded place to arrive at a decision. After a night and a day of consideration, Þorgeirr declares that Iceland must have but one law and one faith. And, to the surprise of many in attendance, he declares that that faith should be Christianity. Ari notes:

Then it was decreed as law that all the men in this land should become Christians and accept baptism, if they had not done so already. But the exposure of [unwanted] infants should remain

legal as well as the consumption of horsemeat. Men could make sacrifices in secret if they wished, but they would be liable for the punishment of lesser outlawry if their acts were witnessed in public. (Gordon 1957, 38; present author's translation)

Ari's rendering of the Conversion is strikingly bloodless, to be sure, but it is also strikingly superficial: a conversion that still permits pagan rituals in private, as well as the public performance of customs severely tabooed in the new faith (i.e., infanticide and the consumption of horseflesh) could hardly be regarded as a profound turning of hearts. And indeed, the medieval writers of Scandinavia make clear the political and economic advantages that often motivated their forebears' initial conversions. Baptism could bring about new and powerful alliances, stimulate trading relations, and offer access to goods or contacts otherwise impossible to obtain. In accounts of the conversion of the Danish King Harald Bluetooth Gormsson (c. 958–87), an ancestor of King St Knud as well as St Knud Lavard, medieval chroniclers note that baptism saved the king and his land from an imminent invasion from the Frankish King Otta (Otto I) (*Rerum gestarum Saxoniarum* 1964, 3:65; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ch. 24–7). In a particularly laconic passage within the Icelandic *Eyrbyggja saga*, we see the crafty and powerful chieftain-priest (*goði*) Snorri Þorgrímsson using the Icelandic mass conversion as a means of maintaining and even enhancing his local power: 'It was Snorri the *goði* more than anyone else who persuaded the people of the Western Fjords to take up the Christian faith' (1959, ch. 49, p. 104).

Especially in the upper echelons of society, however, such conversions were often linked in one way or another with the cult of the saints. Churches necessitated holy relics and the patronage of a saint who would remain associated with the building in perpetuity, even in an era when trained priests were few to be found. The conferral of holy relics, the donation of items for a chapel or altar, the preparation of artwork in honour of a saint, the selection of a holy patron or supplementary patron for a particular church – all such acts helped solidify an understanding of Christianity in this new domain.

While the official adoption of Christianity sometimes came swiftly and decisively, actual conversion could lag significantly. In this gradual transformation of world view and practice, spanning years or generations or even centuries, the cult of the saints – and particularly that of Nordic saints – proved both an index and an implement of change. The new faith became concretized and comprehensible through the living and dying witness of locally known individuals – ascetic hermits and anchorites, fervent (if irascible) monarchs,

persuasive missionaries, capable bishops, pious lay people. Christians of the North found both models and intercessors in these figures, dedicating churches and altars to them even while also venerating relics and saints from farther afield. In these myriad instances of honouring and appealing to the privileged local friends of Christ, Scandinavians of the five centuries between the Conversion and the Reformation naturalized their new faith, rooting it integrally in the soil and experience of this northern and western periphery of medieval Christendom.

The Roots of Sainthood

In Christian thought, recognized saints are distinguished by two qualities. First, they need to have lived exemplary lives on earth, so much so that their contemporaries took note of them and expected them to reach heaven. This did not mean, of course, that they were without sin: indeed, many saints, both continental and Nordic, have strikingly checkered pasts. Rather, in late classical and medieval sainthood, the exemplary nature of their lives often boils down to being in the right place at the right time, or making a crucial decision that affected the fortunes of the church thereafter: suffering martyrdom at the hands of a vicious opponent of the faith, establishing a church in an outlying region, renouncing one's status or wealth late in life for a pious existence as an anchorite or monk, tending to the needs of an otherwise forgotten community, and so on. Second, in order to be recognized as a saint, the individual had to evince a willingness to provide supernatural assistance to those in need, sometimes during his or her life, but more crucially after death. As in the rest of the Christian world, medieval Scandinavians prayed with fervour to saints, hoping that they would intercede with God on their behalf, procure for them a needed cure, help in an important undertaking, or guard the family and friends of the petitioner.

Although direct address to God or Jesus was possible in medieval Christianity, the saints offered the faithful an opportunity to turn to a less intimidating go-between. The sainted intercessor mirrored on the supernatural plane the system of patronage and suits familiar from the earthly customs of late classical and medieval court life. In a world in which direct conversation with a monarch was the stuff of legends and tales, ordinary Christians found it natural and respectful to turn to patron saints in their petitions and prayer. These then presented the petitioners' suits to God, asking for favours that they could reasonably

expect, given their close and proven relation with the Almighty. If appealing to an earthly queen or courtier could secure the mercy or assistance of an earthly king, then it stood to reason that appealing to the Queen of Heaven (the Virgin Mary) or one of the other saints could result in a favourable response from the King of Kings.

The notion of sainthood as such is founded on the concept of an afterlife spent in close and intimate contact with the creator of the universe. Christianity is not the only religion to possess such a concept or to suggest that the fortunate dead could become a resource for the less-than-fortunate living. Within the Hebrew scriptures, several passages suggest a practice of praying to or for the dead. Elijah was said to have been taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot, and to have conferred some of his spiritual powers upon his disciple Elisha (2 Kings 2:11). After Elisha's death, his bones were in turn found to possess healing qualities, reviving a dead man after his corpse came into chance contact with the remains of the prophet's bones (2 Kings 13:21). Such passages easily predict the kinds of miracles associated with relics of the saints in the Christian era. As St Cyril of Jerusalem declares: 'Even when the soul is gone, power and virtue remain in the bodies of the saints because of the righteous souls which have dwelt in them' (Cruz 1977, 302).

Although Elijah and Elisha could be regarded as illustrative of the spiritual and corporeal efficacy of the holy dead, scriptural evidence also existed for the notion of a more generalized resurrection of the dead and attendant powers to all thus raised. In the Second Book of Maccabees, the hero Judas Maccabaeus collects money for making a sin offering on behalf of the souls of Jewish soldiers who died in the possession of pagan talismans. The chronicler writes:

For had he not expected the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead, whereas if he had in view the splendid recompense reserved for those who make a pious end, the thought was holy and devout. Hence, he had this expiatory sacrifice offered for the dead, so that they might be released from their sin. (2 Macc. 12:44–5)

Later in the same book, Judas describes a vision he has had of the deceased high priest Onias 'stretching out his hands and praying for the whole Jewish community' (15:12), an image predictive of the Christian concept of saintly intercession. Onias in turn introduces Judas to the deceased prophet Jeremiah, 'equally remarkable for his great age and dignity and invested with a marvellous and impressive air of majesty' (15:13). Thus we see the beginnings of the Christian notion of a threefold 'communion of saints' – the living faithful (Judas

and his compatriots), the dead in need of expiation (the deceased soldiers for whom he makes an expiatory sacrifice), and the dead in glory (Onias and Jeremiah), bound together by an economy of prayer. The living pray for the dead in need, while the glorified dead pray for the living in need.

The belief in the resurrection of a rewarded and empowered dead was important in Pharisaical teachings at the time of Christ, and Jesus himself staunchly defended its validity against the scoffing of the Sadducees (e.g., Mk 12:24, Jn 11:24). The early Christians embraced it as a creedal verity, seeing in Christ's resurrection the first fruits of God's covenant with all humanity. Thus, Paul and other writers of the Epistles exhort the faithful to accept the resurrection of the dead boldly, not as the learned opinion of rabbinic sages, but as an essential tenet of every Christian's faith: 'We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that in the same way God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (Thess 4:14; see also 1 Cor 15:12-14; Jn 6:39-40; Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 4:14; Phil 3:10-11).

As Christianity spread through the broader Mediterranean world, however, this central element of belief came into marked conflict with views of the dead and afterlife in other religions. In particular, as Peter Brown (1981) has shown, the concept departed from the norms of belief and propriety in the Greco-Roman religion of the first centuries of the current era. From a very early period onward, an important ritual event in the development of a saint's cult was the *elevatio*, the public display of a saint's 'relics' – bones and other preserved body parts belonging to the deceased – on an altar for the faithful to contemplate and entreat. The celebration of mass within funerary structures, such as the Roman catacombs, further linked the young clandestine religion with the physical remains of deceased members. The notions of the dead as supernatural 'friends' – intercessors with God – and belief in the divinely sanctioned power of holy relics, could not have been farther from the tastes and convictions of pagans of the time, who regarded the dead and their corpses with fear and abhorrence. On the other hand, *ex voto* sculptures – models of hands, legs, or other body parts that may have been miraculously cured – have been found at pagan sacred spring sites long before the arrival of Christianity in Gaul, implying the notion of pagan prayer and pilgrimage to such places for help with specific bodily ailments (see Fuglesang 2004). Such prayers or offerings were almost certainly directed at deities or nature spirits rather than human dead, yet the practice implies a background of common goals and views upon which the Christian cult of the saints could grow. Pilgrimage, too, had roots in pagan practices, becoming adopted by early Christians in the Mediterranean region (Elsner and

Rutherford 2006). As Brown argues, the veneration of the dead at the site of their graves, or at shrines created to hold their elevated remains, localized and familiarized Christian religious practices, weaning the faith away from its Middle Eastern origins and, significantly, investing local places and authorities (particularly bishops) with the salvific powers that pagans had associated with their own holy sites and household altars.

Sainthood Comes of Age: The Ideas and Influence of St Augustine

St Augustine (354–430), the quintessential convert to the faith and exemplary bishop of the North African see of Hippo, is generally regarded as a founding figure in the establishment of the cult of the saints, as it becomes known in the Middle Ages. Indeed, it is in his writings that the cult of the saints gains some of its most explicit theological support and principal literary genres.

Augustine's most important writings on sainthood occur in the later chapters of his encyclopedic *De civitate Dei* (*City of God*). There, he presents belief in saintly intercession and miracles not as a novelty but as a continuation of supernatural wonders signalled already in New Testament accounts of Christ and the Apostles.¹ In Augustine's view, miracles – be they associated with Christ, the Apostles, or a later saint – all occur so as to confirm and strengthen the faith of believers. He writes: 'The miracles were made known to help men's faith ... [They] are read to our people in our churches to nourish their faith, although the people would not be in the churches to hear them unless the miracles were already believed' (XXII, ch. 8; 513). They are, in other words, a kind of bonus given to those who have already chosen to believe, rather than proofs furnished to non-aligned sceptics. Further, all such occurrences merely confirm the ultimate miraculous truth: the resurrection of Christ. 'Now the faith to which all these miracles bear witness is the faith that holds that Christ rose bodily from the dead and ascended with His flesh into heaven, because, of course, the martyrs were witnesses to this faith' (XXII, ch. 8; 517).

That miracles continue to take place in the present as well as in the past is confirmed in Augustine's text by miraculous healings at the graves of Christian martyrs, such as those of Protasius and Gervasius at Milan:

A great many people managed to hear of a blind man whose

sight was restored ... [A]n immense multitude of people was gathered to venerate the relics of the martyrs Protasius and Gervasius, and so witnessed what took place. The relics had been hidden, and no one knew where they were until the hiding place was revealed in a dream to Bishop Ambrose, who thereupon went and found them. It was on that occasion that the long-enduring darkness dropped from the blind man's eyes and he saw the light of day. (XXII, ch. 8; 513–14)

Clearly, as the assembled throng demonstrates, Augustine is more an observer of a culture of saint veneration already well underway by his time rather than an initiator of novel devotions.

Given the seamless unity that Augustine sees between the miracles of saints, the will of God, and the 'supreme miracle' of the resurrection of the dead, it follows logically that Christians should be informed of the supernatural wonders occurring in their own times and locales. Augustine laments the fact that often such wonders are relegated to obscurity:

The truth is that even today miracles are being wrought in the name of Christ, sometimes through His sacraments and sometimes through the intercession of His saints. Only, such miracles do not strike the imagination with the same flashing brilliance as the earlier miracles, and so they do not get the same flashing publicity as the others did. The fact that the canon of our Scriptures is definitively closed brings it about that the original miracles [of the times of Jesus and the Apostles] are everywhere repeated and are fixed in people's memory, whereas contemporary miracles which happen here or there seldom become known even to the whole of the local population in and around the place where they occur. (XXII, ch. 8; 513)

Augustine calls for clerics to record such latter-day miracles whenever and wherever they occur so as to remedy this tendency, thereby documenting the ongoing workings of Providence in human affairs. The authority of this magisterial figure in Western Christendom gave formative encouragement to what would become a key genre of medieval hagiography as well as medieval culture in general. It became the task and privilege of bishops, abbots, learned monks, and occasionally learned nuns to write a biography (*vita*) of each local worthy who appeared to have attained sanctity and to compile a compendium of miracles (*libellus miraculorum*) as a written witness of this divine intervention. These texts, in turn, became vehicles by

which local miracles reached a broader audience, just as Augustine had hoped. The result was not only a greater awareness of God's present wonders, but the foundation of a system of pilgrimage that linked the local to the wider Christian world and became one of the most distinctive marks of medieval lay piety (Sumption 1975). Seeking divine assistance, the living in need trekked faithfully to the gravesides or shrines of the dead in glory, while local clerics stood by, eager to record further occurrences of the miraculous. In the process, a literary genre was born, one with its own standards of evidence, rhetorical norms, and aesthetics.

Pope Saint Gregory

By the time of Pope St Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) clerical and lay interest in saints' lives had grown into a major expression of spirituality. In preparing his famous *Dialogues*, Gregory wrote to his brother bishop Maximianus of Syracuse, asking him to record miracles which, apparently, Maximianus had already related at least once to Gregory:

My brethren who dwell familiarly with me ... would have me by all means write something in brief fashion concerning the miracles of the Fathers, which we have heard wrought in Italy. For this purpose I earnestly need the help of your charity, that you should briefly inform me of all those which come back to your memory, or which you have happened yourself to know. For I remember that you related certain things, which I have forgotten, concerning the lord abbot Nonnosus, who lived near the lord Anastasius de Pentumis. I beseech you, therefore, to put down this, and whatever others there are, in your letters, and forward them to me with speed ...' (*Dialogues*, 1911 xix)

The bishop's testimony eventually became part of Gregory's study (Book 1, ch. 7). Gregory arranges his work into a series of conversations between a wise Gregory and an inquiring Peter. Through this device, he is able to pose and answer many of the questions that troubled or confused the faithful of his day. For instance, when Peter inquires how saints effect their miracles Gregory has this to say:

Such as be the devout servants of God, when necessity requires, work miracles both manner of ways: so that sometime they effect wonderful things by their prayers, and sometime only by their power and authority. For St. John says: 'So many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God' [John 1: 12]. They, then, that by power be the sons of God, what marvel is it, if by power they be able to do wonderful things? (Book 2, ch. 30; 90)

Gregory then demonstrates what he means by recounting two miracles, one accomplished by St Benedict of Nursia by virtue of his 'authority' (the freeing of a man from his fetters) and the other accomplished by prayer (the revival of a dead child). Gregory's work, again, helped extend lay interest in the cult of the saints and served as a model for many of the later *vitae*. Widely disseminated throughout Europe, Gregory's *Dialogues* were translated into Old Norse as well (Bjarnarson 1878; Benediktsson 1963).

Relics, Pilgrimage, and Concrete Contact

While prayers to saints could occur anywhere and at any time, the emerging hagiographic tradition attached special importance to proximity and concreteness. Placing oneself in the very presence of a saint's remains added fervour and increased the likelihood of success of one's intentions. Not only were fragments of the saint's body seen as efficacious, but objects that saints had touched or owned also possessed the potential to cure or aid. In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul is depicted working miracles through such secondary objects: 'Even handkerchiefs and aprons were carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out' (Acts 19: 12). In medieval Christianity, such objects (*benediciones*) were prized, and circulated between churches and dioceses as valued gifts, sometimes through royal or aristocratic patronage. Their conferral allowed clerics to share God's favour with allies, ecclesiastical or worldly, spawning new sites of pilgrimage elsewhere while simultaneously underscoring the efficacy of the original saint or shrine.

The same potential lay in 'translation' (*translatio*) – the removal of part or all of a saint's relics to a new site, be it a magnificent shrine in a cathedral chapel, an as-yet-unbuilt edifice in a distant kingdom, a portable reliquary, or the main altar of a local church. Often, the dates

of translation of saints' relics became recognized as feast days alongside the dates of their deaths, so that the same saint could appear more than once in the swelling annual calendar. Monarchs, for their part, soon recognized that by associating themselves with saintly relics, or financing or encouraging their translation, they could not only enhance their own spiritual and physical welfare but also win the affection and loyalty of subjects. In Scandinavia, as elsewhere, such sacred items became important attractions at the monasteries, churches, and cathedrals where they were eventually deposited.

Varieties of Saints

For Augustine, sainthood and martyrdom were largely synonymous. The glorified dead were men and women who had unflinchingly sacrificed their lives during the violent persecutions of the first centuries of the faith. Some had been great apostles, like Peter and Paul, whose place of martyrdom at Rome became the centre of the Western Christian world. Others had been simple lay folk, tortured to death by enraged or sadistic tormentors. Because of this focus on martyrdom, saints' *vitae* characteristically devoted attention to the *mors*, or *passio*, the situation and events surrounding the saint's death. As time went by, however, the image of the saint broadened, and with it, the places and profiles of saintly careers. Saints might be not only martyrs but clerics like Augustine who wrote about them, or kings who helped establish their cults – and the Christian faith – in their realms. Holy monks and hermit saints also came to be venerated alongside earlier martyrs. And eventually, holy lay people of both high and low estate were added to the ranks of the recognized saints, increasing the variety in personality, livelihood, and life story reflected in authored *vitae*.

As Vauchez (1993) has shown in his examination of the conversion of Central Europe, local saints helped render the new faith both more familiar and more relevant to the faithful outside of Rome, be they military chieftains, urban craftsmen, merchants, or rural peasants. St Martin of Tours (c. 316–97) had spent his life guiding his Christian flock and eradicating pagan holdovers in his Gallic see. Yet his real significance came about only after his death, as his relics attracted pilgrims, miracles, and military allegiances (Vauchez 1993, 5). The Frankish King Clovis (467–511) appealed to St Martin for assistance against the Visigoths and met with success in battle. Placing the saint's emblem on one's shield in this case became a concrete means of

ensuring that saint's intercession in battle or in other endeavours of life. Gifts to saints' shrines grew as a further means of securing or requiting supernatural aid, while the eventual development of indulgences helped the faithful quantify tangibly the supernatural treasures they were storing up in this life for relief from purgatory or clemency at the Last Judgment.

The holy clerics, monks, and hermits of early Christian hagiography were soon joined by royal saints, decidedly worldly individuals who had used their powers on earth to rule wisely or effectively and/or to advance the cause of Christianity in their realms. Charlemagne (742–814) represents perhaps the greatest example of the royal saint. A shrewd military leader, he also took marked interest in the fortunes of the church, and from 800 served under the lofty title of Roman Emperor. Tales of his military adventures were interlarded with accounts of his procurement of holy relics in Jerusalem and Rome and subsequent distribution of them to favoured venues throughout the Frankish realm. Charlemagne was eventually venerated as a saint, although never formally canonized. His canny use of Christian devotion found emulation in monarchs and nobles throughout Northern Europe, including King St Olof Skötkonung of Sweden (d. 1024), King St Olaf of Norway (995–1030), King St Knud of Denmark (d. 1086), Earl St Magnus of Orkney (d. 1116), and King St Eric IX of Sweden (d. 1160). Eventually, female royal saints appeared as well, augmenting the already prominent image of the Virgin Mary as a gracious and compassionate queen, eager to listen to the entreaties of the living in need. Queens in the mould of Constantine's mother St Helena were praised for their selfless disregard for personal comfort or station and their willing service to the poor and needy of their strife-torn realms. Occasionally, as in the case of the legendary saints Brigid of Ireland (sixth century) or Sunniva of Norway (tenth century), such women were said to have renounced worldly station altogether, adopting the life instead of a simple anchorite and leading a community of like-minded faithful into an existence of austerity and prayer.

Over the course of centuries, Christianity pervaded the intimate lives and spiritual experiences of the entire Christian population, cleric and lay, high and low. By the end of the medieval period, saints of decidedly middle-class or even peasant origin were emerging in the canon, while visions were reported from people with comparatively little clerical training. St Birgitta of Sweden (1303–73) and her daughter St Katarina (c. 1331–81) fall into this last category, displaying the intense, personal mystical experiences characteristic of lay spirituality in the aftermath of St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), St Dominic (1170–1221), and St Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–

1226). Although high-born and privileged in many respects, Birgitta and her daughter chose the life of pilgrims in Rome, working for the foundation of an order of men and women, which Katarina would institute after her mother's death. The Birgittines in turn helped canonize a number of Nordic saints during their history and worked to unify the region's perceptions and veneration of local saints.

Table 1 notes the most widely known saints of Scandinavian origin or those who were active in the Nordic region during their lives. Drawn from various sources, particularly the overviews of M.C. Gertz (1908–12), Tore Nyberg (1983), and Fröjmark and Krötzl (1997), it represents only a fraction of the Nordic saints around whom cults developed during the medieval period. It is important to remember, however, that foreign saints were often of equal and even greater significance than these local figures.

Saints' Lives as a Literary and Experiential Enterprise

Monastic libraries, royal annals, and liturgical calendars all became repositories for the growing literature on the glorified dead. Saints' feast days were times in which the sanctified individual came into the spotlight, with a recounting of miracles, singing of hymns, and enumeration of the saint's significance in salvation history. Indeed, the calendar of recognized saints in any given diocese could grow to such an extent that observance of all their feasts could pose economic challenges for authorities. By the early 1500s, for instance, some dioceses in Sweden specified over one hundred days as *festa fori* occasions:

Table 1 Saints of Scandinavian origin

Saint	Year(s)	Feast(s)	Description
Nithard	845	4 February	Martyred at Birka, Sweden.
Ansgar (Anskar)*	c. 801–65	3 February	Frankish monk and bishop of Hamburg-Bremen, missionized Denmark and Sweden.
Rimbert (Rembert)	888	4 February	Frankish monk and bishop of Hamburg-Bremen, associate of St Ansgar.
Poppo	900s		Bishop and missionary, converted King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark.
Gorman	965	28 August	Benedictine bishop of Slesvig, missionary.
Sunniva (Sunnifa, Synøve)*	before 996	8 July	English- or Irish-born anchorite, martyred at Selja, Norway. Translated to Bergen 1170.
Unni (Huno, Unno)	936	17 September	Frankish or English-born bishop of Hamburg-Bremen, active in missionizing Denmark and Sweden.
Liafdag of Ribe	c. 950		Bishop and martyr, active in Jutland, Denmark.
Thøger (Theodgarus)	1000s		Frankish priest, active in Denmark, Norway, and England. Translated 1067.
Olof Skötkonung (Olaf)	r. 993–1024	30 July	Swedish king, converted by St Sigfrid, martyred at Stockholm. Father of Ingegerd.
Ulfrid (Wilfrid)	1028	28 July	English-born missionary and martyr, active in Sweden and Germany.
Olaf (Óláfr, Olav) Haraldsson*	995–1030	29 July	Norwegian king, missionized realm, celebrated as martyr.
Unaman, Sunaman, Winaman	1040	15 February, 12 June	English-born nephews of St Sigfrid, Cluniac monks, martyred at Växjö.
Hallvarð	c. 1043	14–15 May	Norwegian nobleman, kinsman of St Olaf, murdered after sheltering accused woman, enshrined in Oslo after 1120. Symbol of chivalry.

Sigfrid	c. 1045	15 February	English-born missionary and bishop, active in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Converted King St Olaf Skötkonung.
Ingegerd	c. 1001–50		Swedish daughter of King St Olaf Skötkonung. Wife of Duke Yaroslav of Kiev. Entered convent late in life. Venerated as Orthodox saint.
Eric	before 1069		Missionary martyr, monk, active in Norrland, Sweden.
Stefan (Staffan)	1075	2 June	Frankish-born missionary bishop of Hamburg-Bremen. Martyr. Relics at Norrala church, Hälsingland, Sweden.
Ansueris	1066	17 July	Benedictine abbot and martyr, active in Denmark. Killed with twenty-eight companions by Wends.
Adalvard of Skara	1070		Archbishop of Skara, sent from Bremen to missionize Västergötland, Värmland. Started work on Skara Cathedral.
David	1080	15 July	English-born Benedictine or Cluniac monk, active with St Sigfrid as missionary in Sweden, founded monastery at Munktorp. Later bishop of Västerås.
Eskil	1086	12 July	English-born companion of St Sigfrid. Became bishop of Strängnäs. Buried at Eskilstuna.
Knud (Knut, Cnut, Canute)	c. 1086	19 January	Danish king, active in missionization, murdered by rebels, celebrated as a martyr. Canonized 1098 at urging of brother King Erik Ejegod.
Ragnhild of Södertälje	1100s		Pious Swedish laywoman, founded church at Södertälje.
Torger of Strand i Älgå	1100s		Relics at Strand, Värmland; locally venerated.

Botvid	1100	28 July	Swedish convert and martyr. Converted while travelling to England, returned as missionary. Relics at Botkyrka church from 1129.
Torsten	1100		Shepherd, martyr. Relics at Bjurum, Sweden
Magnus Erlendsson*	1116	16 April	Orcadian earl, celebrated as martyr. Translated 1136.
Jón Ögmundarson	1121	8 March	Icelandic bishop of Hólar. Translated 1200.
Knud Lavard* (Knut, Canute)	1131	7 January, 25 June	Danish nobleman, celebrated as martyr. Canonized 1169/70 at urging of son, King Valdemar the Great. Relics at monastic church at Ringsted, Denmark.
Botulf	1150	17 June	Martyr saint, recognized in Skara, Sweden.
Kjeld (Ketillus)	1150		Danish canon, active Viborg. Translated 1189.
Vicelin	c. 1086–1154	12 December	Frankish missionary, founder of monasteries. Associate of St Knud Lavard.
Henrik (Henry)*	c. 1156	19 January	English-born missionary bishop of Uppsala, active in Sweden and Finland, martyred in Finland.
Rögnvald (Ronald)	1158	8 March	Orcadian chieftain, built cathedral of St Magnus in Kirkwall. Murdered by rebels and celebrated as a martyr.
Eric (Erik IX)*	1160	18 May	Swedish king, missionized realm, celebrated as martyr.
Helena (Helen of Skövde, Ellin)	1160	30 or 31 July	Swedish noblewoman, convert. Built churches, pilgrim to Rome after husband's death. Falsely accused of murder in Sweden, executed. Cult authorized already 1164.
Margareta of Roskilde	1176	1 November	Danish laywoman, murdered by husband, cause advanced by Bishop Absalon. Relics translated to Roskilde.

Niels Knudssen	1180		Son of King Knud Magnussen, venerated in Århus. Attempts at canonization from 1250s and mid-1300s.
Eysteinn Erlendsson	1188		Norwegian bishop of Nidaros, Trondheim.
Thorleifr Breidskegg	1191		Norwegian prince, celebrated as martyr in Elverum, Norway.
Þorlákr Þórhallsson (Thorlac)*	1133–93	23 December	Icelandic bishop of Skálholt. Reformer. Translated 1198.
Torgils (Torkel, Thorkillius)	1200s		Martyr, relics at Kumla church, Sweden.
Nikolaus	1200s		Priest active in Skara diocese, murdered while taking communion to sick parishioner. Declared saint 1220.
Vilhelm of Æbleholt (William)	1203	6 April	Frankish missionary, sent to Denmark to reform monastery there. Founded Abbey of St Thomas, Zealand. Translated 1224.
Anders of Slagelse (Andreas)	c. 1205		Danish priest. Miraculous travel in connection with pilgrimage.
Guðmundr Arason	1161–1237	16 March	Icelandic bishop of Hólar. Elevated 1315.
Holmger	1248		Swedish son of Knud Långe. Relics at Sko.
Erik Plogpenning	1250		Danish king, celebrated as martyr, buried in Ringsted, beside grave of Knud Lavard.
Hyacinth	1185–1257	17 August	Dominican missionary active in Baltic region, including Sweden. Canonized 1594.
Ingrid	1282	2 September	Swedish Dominican nun, founded cloister of St Martin at Skänninge. Canonization process opened 1405, translation 1507.
Margaret of Nordnes	1290		Norwegian noblewoman, purportedly daughter of King Erik Magnusson, executed as imposter.
Magnhild of Fulltofta	1300s		Pious laywoman, relics preserved initially at Fulltofta, Skåne, later translated to Lund.

Björn (Bero)	1309		Pastor of Klockrike parish, Östergötland, Sweden. Relics translated to Linköping c. 1400.
Brynolf Algotsson Hemming	r. 1278–1317	9 May	Swedish bishop of Skara. Canonized 1498.
	c. 1290–1366		Bishop of Åbo, Finland, associate of St Birgitta. Translated 1515.
Birgitta (Bridget)	1303–73	23 July	Swedish noblewoman and visionary, founder of Birgittine order. Canonized 1391.
Katarina (Catharine)*	1331–81	2 August	Swedish noblewoman, daughter of St Birgitta. Active in founding of Birgittines. Translated 1487.
Nils Hermansson (Nikolaus)	1391		Swedish bishop of Linköping, associate of St Birgitta.
Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson	c. 1390–1436		Swedish miner, of German descent. Led revolt against King Erik of Pomerania 1434, elected Captain of the Realm, murdered 1436. Relics at Örebro.
Sten	1482		Dominican friar, active at Skara.
Willehad	1572	9 July	Danish-born Franciscan. Martyred in Netherlands during Reformation.

* Included in this study.

days on which all labour was forbidden (Andrén 1999, 61). On such days, the official saint's *vita*, often long and detailed, could be delivered from the pulpit in an abbreviated set of pithy or memorable readings. Even more concrete and memorable were marketplace dramas reenacting the saint's life (or martyrdom) in vivid detail, acted out by clerics in training, local townspeople, or members of local guilds.

Depictions of the saint in stained glass windows, tapestries, sculptures, or wall paintings reminded the faithful of the holy intercessor throughout the year. In such visual presentations, the most striking details of the *vita*, e.g., a memorable device of torture by which the saint died, a church or cathedral commissioned by the saint, an emblem of the role or office held in life, or some other distinctive physical attribute helped the viewer recognize the saint depicted.

Not surprisingly, peasants and elite alike came to reckon time by the succession of saints' days. Chroniclers recounted the occurrence of important historical events through reference to the feast days they fell on or near. Peasants performed annual agricultural duties on particular saints' feasts: in Swedish and Finnish custom, cattle were released from their winter confinement on the Feast of St George (23

April), regardless of the weather that day. Such acts both served the practical purpose of organizing time and duties, and also appealed to the holy intercessor for assistance during the year. St George, honoured by the observance of his feast, might be expected to keep a watchful eye over the farmer's prized livestock. Or even more ominously, the cattle of an impious farmer who failed to observe the custom might be stricken with an unknown disease and die. Secular authorities, building on the calendar of the saints, organized market days to fall on particular feast days, uniting these occasions of commerce with sanctioned moments of spiritual celebration. Illustrative of this tendency was the Elinsmässomarknad, an annual market held in Skara, Sweden, in connection with St Helen (Ellin) of Skövde's feast, 30 July (Lundén 1983, 133). The annual Siffermässomarknad of Växjö, Sweden, was a similar occasion, connected with St Sigfrid and his feast of 15 February (Lundén 1983, 60). It is easy to understand, in this light, why the cult of the saints came to occupy such a prominent role in medieval Christian life and how many different emotional and spiritual needs the tradition supplied to individuals, lowborn or high.

With time, *vitae* became further organized into legendaries: anthologies of saint's lives and miracles listed in roughly chronological, geographic, or calendrical order. Most famous of the compilers of such works was the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1230–98), whose *Legenda aurea* (c. 1262–6; Kalinke 1996, 7) became second only to the Bible in medieval popularity. Serving as a sourcebook for clerics' sermons as well as a font of inspiration for laity fortunate enough to own a copy and possess skill in reading, the *Legenda aurea* shaped medieval ideas of sainthood and heroism for centuries. In an era of Latin dominance, it nonetheless underwent translation into at least a dozen European languages, inspiring other vernacular legendaries as well in its wake. The fifteenth-century *Der Heiligen Leben* influenced hagiography throughout Northern Europe, offering German versions of many of the *Legenda aurea*'s most familiar *vitae* (Kalinke 1996, 8). In Iceland, the wealthy farmer Björn Porleifsson produced his own translation of Low German *vitae*, *Reykjahólarbók*, during the first half of the sixteenth century (Kalinke 1996). His work illustrates the influence that German vernacular texts had on Scandinavian writing during the final decades before the Reformation.

The anthologizing of saints' *vitae* and miracles inevitably helped standardize hagiographic narratives, and by the end of the medieval period, we can easily recognize typical patterns in terms of narrative progression, revelation of sanctity, and nature of miracles (Tubach 1969, Bray 1992). Certain varieties of miracle recur, e.g., the

springing forth of a healing spring at the site of a martyr's death, the resistance of a saint's body to decomposition after death, or the resistance of holy relics to fire. On the other hand, some saints, such as St Birgitta, became recognized through the swift decomposition of their bodies, which allowed for the more immediate recovery of her bones for translation. Some miracles arise at a given moment and then recur in later saints' lives, as for example, stigmata, first experienced by St Francis of Assisi, in 1224. Later saints undergo mystical experiences, such as a supernatural marriage to Christ or a powerful sensation of aspects of the Passion. Through hagiographic literature, saints come to seem more and more like each other from place to place and era to era, even while the cult of the saints itself afforded one of the few sanctioned opportunities for the celebration of individuality per se in medieval culture.

By the twelfth century, Roman authorities had begun to exercise control over the process of identifying saints, establishing a system of inquiry that soon began to influence the literary structure of both *vitae* and *libelli miraculorum*. Prior to this time, as Fröjmark and Krötzel (1997, 140–1) show, the recognition of Nordic saints lay entirely in the hands of local authorities, particularly bishops. Building a case for canonization in Rome became progressively more legalistic and time-consuming over the next centuries, with testimony taken under oath and critics ('devil's advocates') employed to question the veracity of the proceedings at every turn. At the same time, however, earlier 'legendary' saints remained important: the rigorous examination of the historicity of the calendar of the saints as a whole had to wait until the twentieth century.

It is striking that although Scandinavia entered the Christian world well after the beginnings of sainthood, the traditions regarding saints in the region recapitulate in abbreviated form the long history of hagiography that had already occurred. Thus, the region has its early missionary, martyr, and hermit saints, such as Ansgar, Henrik, and Sunniva, its royal missionary kings, such as Olaf, Magnus, Knud, and Eric, its exemplary bishops, such as Þorlákr, and its lay mystics, such as Birgitta and Katarina. Far from being disconnected from the rest of Christian Europe, Scandinavians wrote testimonials to miracles that had occurred locally through the intercession of foreign saints and read and translated *vitae* of saints that had lived out their days far away from the region. They went on pilgrimages to the shrines of saints within Scandinavia and often far beyond as well: to Canterbury, Santiago de Compostela, Rome, the Holy Land. In every sense, the hagiographic lore of Scandinavia was intimately connected with and fully integrated into the traditions of the rest of Europe.

The Cult of the Saints and the Reformation

August 10, 1543

The day after the anniversary of St. Birgitta's canonization, at eight in the morning, Master Clas, Bishop of Linköping, came to Vadstena with many clerics. He conducted a synod before a large audience, although we had not been notified in advance. And there he abolished many things: the sacrifice of the Mass, holy water at Confession, our order's habit, and much besides, thwarting our service to God. And on the next day, he confronted the sisters, abolishing the *Dignare* and the *Ora pro nobis*. May his days therefore be few, and may another take over his office as bishop!

(*Diarium Vadstenense*, items 1192–3, pp. 460–1)

The close practical and spiritual linkage of the church hierarchy, monastic orders, and the cult of the saints eventually proved cataclysmic to the fortunes of all three in Northern Europe. The veneration of saints had served as a focus for lay giving, and many churches and monasteries had amassed wealth through the offerings of hopeful or grateful petitioners. These institutions, in turn, had continued to promote their associated saints as efficacious intercessors, striving to record and publicize all miracles attributed to the saint in the tradition established so many centuries before by St Augustine. In his wide-ranging critique of church institutions, Martin Luther decried the economic aspects of this devotionism and the seeming credulity of promoters of the cult of the saints. In time, devotion to the saints was called into question as a form of idolatry or superstition, and the devotional practices of pilgrimage sites and shrines were suppressed.

The Lutheran Reformation reached Scandinavia via its close intellectual contacts with northern Germany. Already in 1517, Luther's protests awoke a sympathetic response among Danish reformers, and Frederik I (r. 1523–33) took steps during his reign to nationalize and restructure the church in Denmark (Jespersen 2004, 86). In the coup of 1536, Christian III swept away all vestiges of Catholic allegiance in Denmark, defrocking the country's Catholic bishops and proclaiming evangelical Lutheranism as the state religion (*ibid.*, 87). The simultaneous dissolution of the monasteries transferred the church's considerable accumulated wealth to the crown and brought about an abrupt end to the official promotion of saints and pilgrimage sites. The Danish Reformation soon extended to

the entirety of the empire, including Norway and Iceland, although local resistance to the abandonment of saints in particular could linger on for generations.

In Sweden-Finland, King Gustav Vasa (r. 1523–60) viewed the Reformation as a convenient means of consolidating the power and wealth of the Crown. In 1527, at the Diet of Västerås, the king threatened to resign unless the aristocracy and church estates agreed to substantive changes in the status and jurisdiction of ecclesiastical authorities (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1984, 61–2; Andrén 1999, 44–58). In the resulting restructuring, Vasa assumed control over the church hierarchy and its appointments, and confiscated all income he deemed superfluous, awarding it instead to supportive aristocrats or redirecting it into the royal treasury. These appropriations often involved stripping the altars of local saints, removing their accumulated accoutrements – often the *ex voto* gifts of grateful petitioners. The *Diarium Vadstenense* records the brothers' outrage at the king's confiscation of five silver platters from the shrine of St Katarina in 1524 (*Diarium Vadstenense*, 22). Similar purgings took place in Denmark: Kruse (2003, 22) recounts the burning of a statue of St Lucius, confiscated from its place of honour in the Cathedral of Roskilde after the suppression of the saint's cult there. Lay reactions to such actions could prove strident, especially when confiscations extended to such central and visible items of liturgical practice as clerical vestments, candlesticks, or even church bells (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1984, 63). Yet the deeper spiritual effects of witnessing the stripping of a beloved intercessor's altar or the destruction of his or her image are difficult to measure. In many cases, it appears that devotions to the saints shifted from public, communal practice to personal and domestic devotionism, where it could live on for some time, perhaps even for generations.

The enforcement of Lutheran reforms focused initially on the clergy and led to the removal of many male clerics who refused to alter their spiritual outlooks. Female clerics – nuns and abbesses – were disenfranchised entirely. Among the laity, however, the reforms took root only gradually, over the course of generations, and many aspects of earlier Christian practice and spirituality remained operative in the Nordic region well into the eighteenth century. Peasants experienced the dismantling of the cult of the saints most concretely through their gradual loss of once work-free feast days and the suppression of many of the festive occasions and customs associated with them. Such liturgical changes aimed at returning the liturgical calendar to observance of strictly biblical events alone, but it gratified the needs of emerging industries as well, which depended on the continual diligence and hard work of employees (Andrén 1999, 61–3). In the

Swedish reformer Georg Norman's *Articuli ordinantiae* of 1540, liturgical feasts were to be reduced to a bare minimum of New Testament memorials, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost (ibid., 118–120). Ministers sought to reeducate their flocks to regard saints as figures to emulate rather than as intercessors to rely upon. Prayer to the saints was strictly forbidden. Images and customs connected with the saints were castigated as idolatrous and confiscated or suppressed during bishops' visitations to churches in their sees (ibid., 120).

Yet even as church interiors lost their sculptural and painted images of the saints, memories of holy intercessors remained. Farmers continued to reckon time and agricultural duties by means of saints' days, which gradually became envisioned as personal name days instead. Old customs associated with saints' feasts survived sporadically: bonfire traditions on the Eve of St Walpurgis or St John the Baptist, mumming traditions on the Feast of St Knud Lavard (Bregenhøj and Vento 1975), processions with candles on the Feast of St Lucy or the Feast of the Purification (Candlemas). Ballads and sayings preserved elements of old devotions. Local bridges and churches remained associated with the famous saints who were credited with their erection, and place names reminded people of holy men and women who had once lived in their locales. Healing springs remained sites for attempted cures and particular practices performed on certain days could guarantee health or welfare in the coming year. In the nineteenth century, a new spirit of romantic antiquarianism transformed these chance survivals into images of national heritage, links with an increasingly remote medieval past. Yet state Lutheranism remained wary of saint veneration as a religious practice, and reminded the faithful that the customs associated with saints' feasts were purely secular entertainments, vestiges of a bygone Catholic era or even of a pre-Christian pagan world view. The literary works that reflect saints' veneration as practised in the region for centuries remained obscure and were often ignored in national literary histories.

Plan of the Present Volume

The present study assembles a body of primary materials generated as a result of the devotion to the cult of the saints within the Nordic region. The selections illustrate the various genres of hagiographic writing common in Scandinavia: *vitae*, lists of miracles, chronicles, sagas, popular legends, liturgical texts, drama, hymns, and ballads.

They also aim at both historical and generic spread.

Part I. Missionary Saints

In the first section of this collection, the authors examine saints from the earliest era of Christian missionization in Scandinavia. Scott A. Mellor examines the Carolingian missionary thrust into the region in the person of the Frankish monk St Ansgar, whose work among the Danes and Swedes would eventually be celebrated in a *vita* written by his friend and successor St Rimbert. Ansgar's mission helped establish the claim of the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen to oversee all of Christian Scandinavia, an ecclesiastical monopoly only gradually replaced by more local sees. As Mellor shows, Rimbert's *vita* for Ansgar differs in various respects from the typical biography of a martyr or confessor. Instead, it appears a hybrid of a saint's *vita* and the literary genre of an ecclesiastical history. As such, the *vita*, portions of which are included here, underscores the ways in which the memory of Ansgar was made to conform to the ecclesiastical and administrative aims of his see.

Thomas A. DuBois looks at the English missionary thrust into the region in the figures of Sts Sunniva and Henrik, martyr saints who died in Norway and Finland, respectively. Their *vitae* reflect the notions of sainthood common in the Christianity of the British Isles and propagated in Scandinavia by both missionaries and migrants. Along with the *vita* of Ansgar, these materials depict the Nordic region as a ground for missionization: a land of innocent but potentially brutal pagans, where dedicated and selfless saints risked all to propagate the faith. Their stories and missionary sites often became implements for the temporal control of ecclesiastical authority in the region many centuries after their deaths. The selections chosen, a Latin version of Sunniva's *vita* and a vernacular Finnish ballad of Henrik's martyrdom, reflect the cult of martyrs as it existed in the Nordic region into the late Middle Ages.

Part II. Royal Saints

Royal and noble saints represent a particularly popular subject in Scandinavian hagiography. John Lindow examines the cult of the most famous of these – King St Olaf – whose shrine at Niðaróss (modern Trondheim) became one of the principal sites of pilgrimage for all of

Northern Europe. Olaf made Christianization both a theme and a tool of his reign: using conversion as a measure of local submission to royal dominance and travelling the realm in an effort to root out pockets of temporal and religious resistance. The selections translated here include Old Norse accounts of Olaf's life, death, and miracles, as well as several skaldic poems about the saint as a holy chieftain.

Maria-Claudia Tomany surveys the cult of St Magnus of Orkney and its relation both to continental and Scandinavian notions of sainthood. While Carolingian sainthood had its influence on the church in the Nordic region, English hagiography also continued to play a role in Nordic Christianity. In Iceland and the British Isles, where Vikings had cultivated Nordic societies that displaced or merged with local English and Celtic elements, *vitae* of saints took on a similarly hybrid nature. Saga accounts of St Magnus depict a Nordic chieftain whose death could be interpreted through the lens of hagio-graphic accounts of martyrdom. Magnus's importance for the local identity of the Orkneys and for the power of church and earls in this region are strikingly illustrated by this vernacular adaptation of the *vita* genre.

Knud Lavard illustrates further the aristocratic and dynastic elements of royal hagiography. The descendent of Denmark's Christianizer King Harald Bluetooth, and nephew of Denmark's King St Knud, Knud Lavard died largely as a result of the envy and fear of competing factions within the royal house. As Thomas A. DuBois and Niels Ingwersen show, his cult displays the ways in which the imagery of Christian martyrdom could be used to buttress royal claims and national identity, particularly in the late Middle Ages. The included selections, two ballads and a play, illustrate the fusion of religious, national, and royal interests even into the era of state Lutheranism.

Tracey Sands examines the cult of King St Eric as a Swedish response to Norwegian and Danish saints. Sweden's Christianization lagged behind that of Norway and Denmark, and the unification of the realm also proceeded gradually. Resistance to the new faith, continued reliance on an oral rather than written system of royal communication, and the perseverance of competing dynasties within the recently unified realm distinguish medieval Sweden from its neighbour to the south. Within this context, church and state authorities employed the image of Eric as a tool of unification, both for the consolidating realm of Sweden and for the diocese of Uppsala. Selections from the *Life of St Eric* include a brief *vita* as well as a selection of miracles.

Part III. Holy Bishops and Nuns

Two articles examine saints of the clergy or of the religious world. Kirsten Wolf surveys the cult and *vita* of Iceland's patron Bishop St Þorlákr (1133–93). Þorlákr's life and career illustrate distinctive aspects of Icelandic Christianity while also signalling the island's assimilation of British and European notions of sainthood. Wolf suggests that the rise of a cult of St Þorlákr postdates and rises in response to earlier efforts to establish King Olaf Tryggvason as a national saint for the island. Þorlákr's *vita* also reflects efforts to implement marital reforms promoted by the Norwegian archbishop Eysteinn and the saint's own embrace of clerical celibacy, a rarity in Iceland in Þorlákr's lifetime. Translated selections from the vernacular *Þorláks saga* recount the holy bishop's death, his appearance to key promoters in dream visions thereafter, and accounts of some of the many miracles attributed to him after that.

Thomas A. DuBois surveys the career and *vita* of St Katarina of Vadstena, daughter to the indomitable St Birgitta. Birgitta and Katarina reflect the core of Birgittine spirituality, the religious outlook of the sole monastic order to have been founded within the Nordic region itself. While Birgitta's works and life have been widely examined both within Nordic scholarship and more broadly, the contributions of Katarina have been largely overlooked. The translated selections from Katarina's fifteenth-century *vita* – one of the first books ever published in the Nordic region – reflect a biography designed to appeal to high-born nuns at Vadstena and the particular trials and challenges of the cloistered life. A further selection offers an eyewitness account of Katarina's translation, illustrating the liturgical grandeur of saint veneration at the close of the Middle Ages.

Part IV. Saints' Lives in Lived Context

Finally, two authors focus on the cultural contexts for the saints' *vitae* and lists of miracles. Marianne Kalinke demonstrates the social and philosophical issues surrounding the concept of royal marital chastity as it is reflected in an Icelandic rendering of the *vita* of continental Sts Henry II and Cunegunde. This *vita* represents a translation of a now-lost Low German text devoted to the chaste emperor and empress of the Holy Roman Empire. As Kalinke shows, the text provides fascinating insights into the ways in which marital chastity, as well as the wider concern of marital consent, evolved in the high and late Middle Ages.

Margaret Cormack examines miracles related to problem pregnancies in Icelandic hagiographic literature. She explores the

textual characteristics of such accounts and suggests their significance to lay Icelanders of the Middle Ages, particularly women. Cormack's survey reminds us of the likely views of the lay farmers, farm wives, and agricultural labourers who made up the majority of all Scandinavian societies and who avidly called upon the saints for assistance in their lives. The translated selections are taken from *Maríu saga*, an Old Norse account of the life and miracles of the Virgin Mary, and reflect the local collection and documentation of saints' miracles in this peripheral outpost of Christianity.

The selection of saints and texts contained in this study is not exhaustive, but illustrative. Its aim is to provide materials and perspectives for the examination of an essential element of Nordic cultural history. Central to the fortunes of church institutions, royal houses, and monasteries, the cult of the saints also touched the hearts and hopes of ordinary Scandinavians. It is hoped that the present volume will provide a glimpse of the rich spiritual life and understandings of Nordic Christians from the time of first conversions to the era of the Reformation.

NOTE

- 1 Earlier in his career, Augustine had ruled out the occurrence of miracles in the contemporary world, seeing them as necessary only during the most formative era of the church (Sumption 1975, 57). Conflicting ideas about miracles remained a source of scepticism towards the cult of the saints throughout the medieval period, despite its widespread popular embrace.

PART I

Missionary Saints

St Ansgar: His Swedish Mission and Its Larger Context

SCOTT A. MELLOR

Introduction

The Life of Saint Ansgar is one of the few works written that is contemporary with the attempts to convert the Scandinavians, more exactly the Danes and the Swedes. However, since it is written in Latin, it is often omitted from medieval Scandinavian studies. This is surprising given the information, and the exciting tale, the *vita* provides. Ansgar, a Benedictine monk from Corbie, in what is today the northern part of Germany, led the first Christian mission to Denmark around 828, accompanied by a brother Autbert. According to the *vita* authored by his friend and follower Rimbert, also a monk at Corbie, no one else was willing to lead a mission into such dangerous heathen regions. A year later, he led a second mission, this time to Sweden, accompanied by a brother Witmar. On the way, according to the *vita*, they were attacked by Vikings, lost their holy books, but finally arrived in Birka on foot and penniless. Birka is mentioned as an *urbs* or fortified city, although it was really a merchant town outside what is today Stockholm. King Horik of Denmark, although himself a pagan, was instrumental in arranging Ansgar's mission as a diplomatic manoeuvre to ensure trade with his Christian neighbours. King Björn was the ruler of Sweden at this time, living in Old Uppsala, and, the *vita* contends, made Ansgar welcome if only to avoid antagonizing Louis the Pious.

Ansgar was made bishop of Hamburg with ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Birka. Pope Gregory IV named him, jointly with Ebo of Rheims, papal legate to all the northern peoples, including the Swedes, Danes, and Slavs. Later copies of his *vita* would broaden his see to include Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland; some copies even included Vinland in North America. In 849, Ansgar became the archbishop of what would become Hamburg-Bremen, an influential site for the conversion of the North.

Towards the end of his life, Ansgar saw much of his work fall apart. Hamburg was sacked by Vikings, and his church there was burned down. It became clear that his missions to Denmark and Sweden were going to fail. He had had visions that he would be martyred, but this never came to pass. In 865 he died of illness at Hamburg. His friend and fellow priest, Rimbert, wrote his *vita* around the year 880, a little more than a decade after his death. It is clear from his *vita* that Rimbert saw his predecessor as a pious man with ambition for doing God's work.

The Politics of Ansgar's Time

In order to understand the world in which Ansgar lived, to understand both the man and his *vita*, it is important to understand his times and political context. In May 799 Pope Leo III (r. 795–816) was waylaid in Rome by personal enemies. He took refuge at the Frankish court. The Frankish king, Charles, had him conducted back to Rome. In November 800 Charles (r. 769–814), later named Charles the Great or Charlemagne, came to Rome himself, where he was received with imperial honours. During Christmas mass at St Peter's Basilica, the Romans acclaimed Charles emperor, whereupon the pope crowned and perhaps anointed him. According to his *vita*, had he known this was going to happen, Charlemagne would never have gone to the church that day; but with his coronation, what came to be called the Holy Roman Empire was formed. Charlemagne's ambition was to create a Europe that was religiously and politically united. The following year, 801, marked the birth of Ansgar, a man who would help to build the religious, if not the political, uniformity that Charlemagne sought. Ansgar, an industrious man from what is today the northern part of Germany, would spend most of his days trying to convert Denmark and Sweden to the faith and creating a religious and political base from which to rule this ecclesiastical region.

According to his *vita*, Ansgar may have met Charlemagne. It is clear that he knew his successor, Louis I. Louis I was born in 778 and is often called Louis the Pious. He was the son of Charlemagne and succeeded his father as king of the Franks and Holy Roman emperor in 814, ruling until his death in 840. Louis the Pious had three sons: Lothaire, Pepin, and Louis II. Lothaire was named co-emperor with his father and king of Italy, Pepin made king of Aquitaine, and Louis II king of Bavaria. By a second wife, Louis the Pious had another son, Charles, whom he tried to make his successor. Much conflict ensued

until the three elder brothers mounted a united attack supported by Louis the Pious's own generals and Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–44). Louis the Pious was imprisoned, but released a year later. Peace was restored and Louis the Pious was restored as emperor in 835. In 840, upon Louis's death, the three brothers began a civil war for the division of the empire. In 841 Charles and Louis II formed an alliance in support of Pepin. In 858/9 Louis II invaded Charles's lands in the western Frankish kingdom. Unpopular with his nobles and his people, Charles could not raise an army for defence. Hoping that the clergy would aid him in his bid for the crown, Louis II called a synod of bishops. The archbishop of Reims, Hincmar, was loyal to Charles and rallied the ecclesiastical authority against Louis II. In 860 Louis departed from France with a much damaged reputation. His turbulent life ended in 876.

This strife makes the Carolingian period complex for the historian, complicating as well the examination of any influential cleric of the time, such as Ansgar. Therefore I will limit my focus to two issues here: the structure of the *vita*, in which I hope to offer an observation that may help clarify its purpose; and aspects of Ansgar's career as politician and visionary, particularly his arguable success at converting the North. I believe that these two issues are related, as Ansgar's *vita* reveals.

Ansgar and His *Vita*

Several scholars have made valuable observations with regard to Ansgar's *vita*. Tue Gad in his book *Legenden i dansk middelalder* (1961) describes Ansgar's life as that of a confessor. Gad writes in the introduction of his section on confessors:

The other large group of legends in the *Legenda aurea* is about confessors: saints who are not martyrs. Just as the martyr legends have their historical foundation in Christian persecutions of the first centuries, the confessor legends have theirs in the monastic tradition. Even if the ascetics in the desert did not die a violent death, they were, nevertheless, equal to the martyrs: they also offered themselves as a sacrifice to God, they were also honoured by cults, and their achievements were told for edification and entertainment. [Gad 1961, 33; my translation].

Ansgar certainly qualifies under this definition of confessor. His *vita* starts with his visions of how he will be martyred, and ends with apologies that this never happened, though we are told that this is through no fault of Ansgar's. We are informed several times of how, throughout his life, he was willing to do deeds others declined to undertake, for example, go with Harald Klak to Denmark, even in the face of possible bodily harm. Further, Ansgar is certainly out in the 'desert' of the Christian world while trying to convert the Danes and the Swedes of the ninth century. And finally, Ansgar attracted a cult following his death. In his work *Ansgarkulten i Norden* (1989), Sven Helander discusses the Ansgar cult in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, concluding that Ansgar was most popular in Denmark, less so in Sweden, and still less in Norway.

Several works have come out in recent years concerning Ansgar, his *vita*, and his attempts at converting the North. Scholars have made insightful attempts to categorize this somewhat enigmatic *vita* in terms of its structure and content. In his article "'Ansgars liv" som helgonbiografi' (1986), Anders Ekenberg divides the *vita* into six parts: [part I](#), an introduction, comprising Rimbert's [chapter 1](#); [part II](#), an account of Ansgar's early life, occasional lapses into sin and his early visions, [chapters 2–5](#); [part III](#), an overview of Ansgar's works, [chapters 6–34](#); [part IV](#), a look at Ansgar's way of life, [chapters 35–9](#); [part V](#) concerning his death, [chapters 40–1](#); and finally, the conclusion, comprising the *vita*'s final chapter. Ekenberg sees the text as suggesting that Rimbert regards Ansgar's life as that of a martyr, despite the fact that he was not put to death for his faith. He bases his claim on the structure of the text as well as the content of the introduction and conclusion. Yet although Ekenberg's analysis clarifies the structure of the *vita*, and, indeed, works well for many other saints' lives, his expansive [part III](#) ([chapters 6–34](#)), focusing on Ansgar's works, fails to illuminate either the structure or the content of Ansgar's *vita*.

The crux of the problem is that Ansgar disappears from his own *vita*, finding barely any mention from [chapters 16 through 34](#), a portion representing roughly half of the work. A further refinement of Ekenberg's description is thus in order. [Part III](#) can be divided into two parts. The first section, [chapters 6–15](#), details Ansgar's works, including his launching of the mission to Denmark and Sweden and his push for an archdiocese to oversee the Christianization of the region. In the second section, [chapters 16–34](#), Rimbert shifts focus to provide a history of the resulting Danish and Swedish church, albeit one which, in the end, failed in its mission to convert the North. In [chapters 16–18](#), the mission begins to falter and Denmark comes under the rule of a new king who is not favourable to the church.

Ansgar's priests are run out of Sweden, and Hamburg is sacked by Vikings. In chapters 19–34, the missions and archdiocese are barely salvaged by some of Ansgar's agents.

The shift in Ansgar's *vita* from Ansgar himself to a discussion of the missions and what is happening there, *sans* Ansgar, may appear odd if looked at as a traditional *vita* of a martyr or confessor. The irregularity of the text, however, disappears if we see Rimbert working from the paradigm of an ecclesiastical history. A comparison can be found in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (731), a work which Rimbert may have known. Rimbert did not necessarily copy this history; rather he may have drawn on both the *historia* and *vita* models when constructing his own text. After all, Rimbert was not solely concerned with Ansgar's life, but also with relating the foundation of Hamburg as an archdiocese (archbishopric), and the importance of this new institution to the missions in Denmark and Sweden.

Bede's *Historia* follows a regular pattern in recounting the lives and careers of figures important in the foundation of the church in England. For the sake of brevity, Bede's account of Edwin of Northumbria will be used to illustrate the pattern. King Edwin of Northumbria has married a Christian. He is exiled and about to go into battle to regain his kingdom. His wife says that if he were to put his trust in the Christian God he would be victorious. Edwin vows that if he gains victory he will convert. The battle goes in his favour, he regains his kingdom, and does convert to the new faith. Yet at his baptism, he declares that he cannot speak for his people, calling council meeting (thing) to decide the religious adherence of the realm. At the resultant council, the issue is debated and a priest of Woden stands to make this pragmatic plea:

Coifi, the Chief Priest, replied without hesitation: 'Your Majesty, let us give careful consideration to this new teaching; for I frankly admit that, in my experience, the religion that we have hitherto professed seems valueless and powerless. None of your subjects has been more devoted to the service of our gods than myself; yet there are many to whom you show greater favour, who receive greater honours, and who are more successful in all their undertakings. Now, if the gods had power, they would surely have favoured myself, who have been more zealous in their service. Therefore, if on examination you perceive that these new teachings are better and more effectual, let us not hesitate to accept them.' (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, 126–7)

Coifi's view is followed by a more philosophical, theological reason for the conversion, and in the end the Northumbrians choose

Christianity.

This same structural paradigm recurs several times in Bede: an influential pagan (Edwin) has contact with a Christian and as a result decides to place his trust in God. The pagan often faces a threat to his power, but by relying on God is able to vanquish his foes. He then converts, leading to a broader discussion of the conversion for his community. The same structure is found in Ansgar's *vita*. The men of Birka are about to engage in battle. A Christian in the group cries:

‘Listen to me your majesty and my people. In regard to the worship of this God, it is well known to many of us that He can offer much of help to those who place their hope in Him. Many of us have found this to be the case on several occasions when in peril on the sea and in other crises. Why do we reject that which we know to be both useful and serviceable? On several occasions some of us have been in Dorstadt and have adopted this form of religion of our own accord, believing it to be beneficial. Now there are many who threaten our way there and the route is made dangerous by Viking attacks. Why don't we take what seemed so appealing when it was far away and is now brought to us? Why shouldn't we gladly agree to continue as His servants, when we have frequently found that help from this God can be useful to us? People, consider carefully and do not throw away what will be to your advantage. Since we cannot be sure that our own gods will favour us, it is good to have the help of this God who is always, and under all circumstances, able and willing to support those who cry out to Him.’ (*The Life of Ansgar*. My translation, see below, p. 158)

As a result, the men of Birka put their faith in the Christian God and are successful in battle. This scenario is repeated several times in Ansgar's *vita*. The difference from Bede's *Historia* is that in the end, Ansgar's missions will fail. Or will they? Whatever the case on that question, to which I will return below, it is important to note that Ansgar is not present, even if the text implies that these events transpire under Ansgar's direction.

Ansgar's Mission to the North

Rethinking the structure of Ansgar's *vita* as, an ecclesiastical history,

at least in part, may help us understand the political realities of both the *vita* as a text and Ansgar's life itself: both are integrally tied to the Scandinavian missions and the legitimatization of the Hamburg-Bremen archdiocese. Hallencreutz provides a brief but useful examination of Ansgar in his article 'Ansgar: visionär och politiker' (1980). In it, he notes that Swedish historiographers interpret Ansgar as either a faithful missionary or a deceitful (church-)politician. He argues that the mission among the early Swedes, with its base in Hamburg and Bremen and its centre of operation at Birka, was in fact a construct of Frisian tradesmen, an implement in an expansive national and international trade policy undertaken by the Svea royal house. Hallencreutz points out that there were already Christians on Birka at this time, including Christian slaves. Rimbert does not present Ansgar as a typical saint, but rather as a shrewd politician, aware of contemporary political realities. Further, Hallencreutz claims that Ansgar's mission fails to have lasting results among ninth-century Svear because of changes in the economic position of Birka, as well as political difficulties the see of Hamburg-Bremen faced after the division of the Frankish empire.

The issue of the success or failure of Ansgar's mission is a difficult one, not least because it is difficult to state definitively when a nation or a people had been converted. The *Primary Chronicle* from the twelfth century states that when Vladimir of Kiev was baptized in c. 987, all Russia was baptized with him (*Primary Chronicle*, 79–83). For that matter, Bede claims that all Northumbria converted at the end of Edwin's Council. Today there are few scholars who would believe the literalness of such audacious claims. As DuBois suggests in *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (1999), religious groups living side by side influence one another gradually over time. So what does it mean to say that a nation converted to Christianity at a particular time? When we say that Denmark was converted by 950, a century after Ansgar's career, and Sweden a century after that, what do we really mean? Scholars may impose order upon the chaos of reality and assign definitive dates, but in the end these are mere constructs. It would seem reasonable that Ansgar's mission was yet another source of exposure for the Swedes to a Christianity that would some day grow into the dominant religion in the region. From that point of view, Ansgar's mission could certainly be regarded as a success, even if it did not lead to an immediate conversion of the Swedish or Danish populace. Further, Ansgar must have been seen as important to the conversion by the early church in Sweden, since in the thirteenth century a translation into Swedish was written of Rimbert's text, discovered by Elias Brenner in the so-called *Nadhentals closters bok* of the Birgittine convent of Nådendal (Naantali) Finland. In the

seventeenth century, Petrus Lambeck discovered both the Rimbert text and a metrical version of the text in Latin by Gualdo, which Lambeck published in 1652 with a forword and a chronological overview of Ansgar. It was republished including both the Latin and Swedish texts in 1677.

In international trade in the north of Europe, the Vikings took the lead. As religio-social factors changed, Rimbert portrays the pagan opposition to the Ansgar mission spoken of in Adam of Bremen's eleventh-century *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* as Viking aggression. Hallencreutz (1980) maintains that one reason for this opposition stems from local resistance to the expansive policies of the Svea kings, who permitted Christian worship at Birka. Throughout this period, to convert the king was to convert the people in the eyes of the chroniclers. Hallencreutz theorizes that Ansgar opposed Christian slavery, as was common among clerics at the time. At the least, he may have advocated recognition of religious equality, a topic addressed in the second half of Hallencreutz's article. Although the church may have condemned slavery, it was the Frankish empire's move from slavery to serfdom that shaped the regional economy and politics, while at the same time slavery increased on the Iberian peninsula. The Vikings, who were not averse to slavery, may have resisted the mission for this reason. Abolishing slavery might have meant decreased trade with the Arabs to the south, or so the Vikings might have feared. Although this may be true, Hallencreutz overlooks the fact that the Swedes themselves had contact with the Arabs in the south, as well as with Orthodox merchants and rulers in the East. Both Rimbert and Saxo Grammaticus, the Danish chronicler, and several other sources suggest that the political advantages of coming into the fold of the Western church proved vital in royal conversion. Denmark was situated on the border of the Frankish empire, and its rulers surely recognized the political advantage to converting in order to gain the favour of the Frankish rulers. The influence of the English mercantile and political contacts in the tenth century is also considerable. Norway's contact with the rest of Europe was mediated by England and Ireland, both well ensconced in the Western church. Norway and Denmark had contact with believers of Islam and the Orthodox Church as well, but Swedes, due to their eastern geographic location, had more trade and closer ties to these groups and thus likely had more divided allegiances. Although these observations are speculative, it is worth noting the undeniable fact that the trade and political fortunes of the various Nordic realms pulled them in different directions, even if, eventually, all ended up as part of the Western faith.

To conclude, Rimbert draws from both an ecclesiastical history

tradition and the *vita* genre in creating his account of Ansgar's life. Scholars have long discussed the enigmatic and political nature of the *vita*, and perhaps the understanding presented here will aid in further revaluations of Ansgar and his times.

The Manuscript and the Translation

A note on translations and manuscripts. There are several translations of Ansgar's *vita* from the beginning of the last century. A few are listed here: a German translation from 1939 by J.C.M. Laurent; a Danish translation from 1910 by P.A. Fenger; an early Swedish translation from 1926 by Gunnar Rudberg; and a now out-dated English translation from 1921 by Charles H. Robinson. The most recent translation, and arguably the best for its modern language and critical apparatus is the Swedish translation by Eva Odelman from 1986 included in Hallencreutz and Odelman's *Boken om Ansgar*. Along with the translation, the volume contains several articles written by Hallencreutz and Odelman, as well as four other notable scholars.

In the article co-authored by Hallencreutz and Odelman 'Rimbert som ärkebiskop och författare' (1986), the authors discuss the two textual redactions of the *vita*. Version A (their designation), the longer version, is found in three manuscripts. A1, the oldest, from either the ninth or tenth century, found today in the Stuttgart library, seems to originate from an exemplar that Rimbert sent to Bishop Salomon of Konstanz, where it remained until being sold in 1630 to a monastery in Weingarten. A2 is found at the Paris library and was written c. 1200. A3, in the Amien library dates from c. 1300. Hallencreutz and Odelman note that both A2 and A3 have been at Corbie, Ansgar's monastery. The second, shorter version of the *vita* also exists in three manuscripts. B1, at Münster, is called the codex Vicelini. Dating from the twelfth century, it was presented by the Bremen canon Vicelin to the Monastery Abdinghof at Paderborn sometime between 1114 and 1123. B2, at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, was written c. 1150. A second copy of B2, found at the Hamburg Staatsbibliothek, dates from the eighteenth century. Finally B3, a lost manuscript from Hamburg written c. 1100, is preserved in an edition from Cologne from 1642. The shorter B-variant is an abbreviated rendition of A. The translation that follows uses the A-variant, and, more specifically an 1884 edition of it produced by G. Waitz. It should also be noted that both the English translation from 1921 by Charles H. Robinson, and the Swedish translation by Eva Odelman from 1986 were heavily

consulted in preparing the present translation. The Danish translation from 1910 by Fenger and the German translation from 1939 by Laurent were also used as references.

The Life of Ansgar

Chapters 1–6

[Details of the early life and visions of Ansgar, and his eventual arrival at the monastery at Corbie where he enters studies.]

Chapter 7

After this, it happened that a certain King Harold, who ruled over some of the Danes, was beset by hatred and enmity and was driven from his kingdom by other kings of that same province. King Harold came to his serene majesty, the emperor Louis.¹ King Harold asked if he might be seen as worthy to receive the emperor's help to recover his kingdom. The emperor kept the king with him at his court and urged him personally, as well as through others, to accept the Christian faith because then there would be a more intimate relationship between them. And a Christian people would be more eager to come to the aid of their friends if both worshiped the same God. At last, with the help of divine grace, the emperor converted him to the faith. When the waters of holy baptism had been poured over him, the emperor himself received him from the sacred baptismal font and adopted him as his own son.

When the emperor wanted to send King Harold back to his own country so that he could reclaim his kingdom with his help, he began to make serious enquiries about finding a holy and devoted man who could leave with the king, who would continue to be with him, who would teach the king and his people the doctrine of salvation, and who might convince them to receive the faith of the Lord and thereby strengthen them. At a public meeting of his chief men, the emperor brought up this issue with his priest and general laymen. He passionately asked them all to search for such a man who was both willing and worthy of such a task. They all refused and explained that they did not know anyone possessed with such great devotion who would be willing to go on such a dangerous journey in the name of

Christ. Finally, Wala, who was the venerable abbot of our monastery at that time, stood up and told the emperor that he knew a monk in his monastery who burned with passion for the holy faith and was eager to endure suffering in the name of God. He praised both his knowledge and his manner of life and declared that he would be well suited for this journey, though he did not know for certain whether he would be willing to undertake such a mission. Why say more? At the emperor's command, Ansgar was summoned to the court. The abbot explained to him everything that had happened and been said, and what he was being asked to do. He replied that he was prepared to serve God in all things. He was brought before the emperor and asked whether he, for the sake of God, would become King Harold's companion in order to preach the Gospel among the Danish people. He answered emphatically that he was wholly willing. The abbot further explained that he would by no means order him to do this difficult task, but if, of his own free will, he chose to do it, he would be pleased and would give him his authoritative consent. Ansgar answered that he, none the less, chose this burden and by all means wanted to do it.

At last it was announced publicly, and everyone who lived in the abbot's house learned of this. Many were astonished at Ansgar's strength of purpose and that he was so willing to abandon his country and his friends and the brethren with whom he had been brought up and who loved him in order to visit foreign lands and talk with alien and barbarous people. There were many who disapproved of his action, and accosted him with reproaches, while others tried to change his mind, but the man of God remained unmoved from his decision. While day by day the abbot went to the court, Ansgar remained at home. He avoided all company and chose a lonely spot in a neighbouring vineyard for himself. He devoted his time to prayer and reading.

At this time, there was a certain monk with the abbot at our monastery by the name of Autbert. Autbert saw that Ansgar was anxious and distressed and that each day he sat in solitude and did not speak or associate with anyone. He began to feel pity for Ansgar. One day Autbert went to the place where Ansgar was sitting alone in the vineyard and asked him if he really wanted to go on this journey. Ansgar, who hoped that this question had not been asked out of pity, but out of some further objection, answered 'Why do you care about this? Do not bother me with such questions.' But Autbert assured him that he was not making any pretences, but that he really wanted to know if he was determined to go through with this mission. Then Ansgar thanked him for his kindness and said, 'You are asking me if I am willing on God's behalf to go to pagan people in order to preach

the Gospel. I have in no way dared not to do this. Indeed I wish with all my might that I might be given the chance to undertake this journey and that none will be able to discourage me from this my intention.' Then the aforementioned monk said to him, 'As far as I am concerned, I would never let you go alone. For the love of God, I would like to go with you, if you can obtain the consent of the lord abbot.'

So it was that they entered into this holy agreement. And when the abbot came back to the monastery, Ansgar went and explained to him that he had found a companion, who, of his own free will, was willing to share the journey. The abbot asked who it was, and Ansgar said it was brother Autbert. The abbot was greatly surprised. He could not believe that this monk, who belonged to a noble family and was his intimate friend and was highly regarded as the chief administrator of the monastery after the abbot himself, would be willing to undertake such an errand. Nevertheless, the abbot summoned Autbert and questioned him on the matter. He said that, under no circumstances could he let Ansgar go alone, but that he, in the name of Christ, wanted to be his comforter and helper, if he could gain the consent of the abbot and the monks of the monastery. The lord abbot replied that he would give his consent if he chose to undertake this journey of his own free will, since he would not compel anyone in his house to servitude unless they were willing. The venerable abbot did not do this out of any lack of love for Ansgar, but rather because at that time it seemed to him abhorrent and wrong to force anyone against his will to live among pagans.

The two monks were brought before the emperor. He was gratified by their willingness and desire to go and gave them what they would need to conduct services, writing cases, tents, and other things which would be useful and necessary for a long journey. He told them to go with Harold and to take great care with his profession of faith. He entrusted them with strengthening in faith by their godly exhortations both Harold and his companions, who had been baptized together with him, so that they would not return to their old ways by the instigation of the devil, and, at the same time, to urge others to accept the Christian religion by their preaching.

Then the emperor dismissed them. They had no one to help them with menial tasks, since no one in the abbot's household would go with them of their own free will, and the abbot would not force anyone to go against his will. And Harold, in whose protection they were entrusted, was still ignorant and uneducated in the ways of the faith. He was unaware how God's servants ought to behave. Nor did his companions who had only recently been converted and who were raised in a very different faith pay them any heed. Therefore, having

started with great difficulties, they arrived at Cologne. At that time there was a venerable bishop, Hadebald, who sympathized with their needs and gave them a good boat in which they could put all their possessions. On it there were two well-appointed cabins for them. When King Harold saw the boat, he decided to stay with them on it, so that he and they each could have a cabin. Because of this, goodwill and friendship increased between them. From that time forward, his companions also showed them greater consideration.

On leaving the boat they passed through Dorstadt² and crossing in the vicinity of Frisia came to the Danish border. Since Harold could not take peaceful possession of his kingdom for the time being, the emperor gave him a district beyond the river Elbe so that he might be able to take refuge there if need be.

Chapter 8

[The servants of God search for boys from amongst the Danes whom they might teach for the service of God. They establish a school for these boys. However, brother Autbert becomes gravely ill and is carried back to New Corbie where he dies. The scene now switches to the court of Emperor Louis.]

Chapter 9

Meanwhile, ambassadors from the Swedes came to Emperor Louis. Among other errands, they informed the gentle emperor that there were many among their people who wished to convert to the Christian faith. Even their king was favourably inclined to the suggestion and he would allow God's priests to reside there, provided the emperor was generous enough to send suitable preachers to them. His devout majesty heard this with great pleasure. Once more, he began to seek out those whom he might send to this country. He wanted them to determine whether these people were prepared to accept the Christian faith, as the ambassadors had assured him they were, and to preach Christianity to them. Therefore, his majesty, the emperor, once again began to discuss with our abbot, if he possibly could find anyone amongst his monks who was willing to go to this country in Christ's name, or at least someone who could stay with King Harold, so that God's servant Ansgar, who was with him now, could take up this new mission. And so it was that Ansgar was summoned by royal command to the palace, and was ordered not to stop even to shave before coming into the royal presence.³

Ansgar, this man of God, who already beforehand knew why he had been called, burned with fervour and love in his heart for God and considered it a great joy that he might be allowed to win souls for Him. If, on such a voyage, any harm or misfortune might come on him, he would bear it with patience for Christ's sake. He did not hesitate in the least to take up this task because he found comfort in the divine visions he had already had. Earlier, when he was living with you and already had had heavenly inspiration from two visions, he had another one night, in which he had come into a house where several preachers were standing prepared to go out and preach. Standing among them, he was suddenly struck with rapture and saw an unending, clear light, stronger than the radiance of the sun, which came down from heaven and engulfed him. When he wondered what it was, a voice was heard rather like the voice he said he had heard in his first vision, and it said to him, 'Your sin is forgiven.' Filled with the Holy Spirit, as we believe, he answered, saying, 'My Lord, what do you want me to do?' And again the voice was heard, saying, 'Go and proclaim the word of God to the people.'

As God's servant, Ansgar, pondered this vision, he rejoiced in the Lord, because he perceived that what had been commanded of him was already partly fulfilled. And he wished to add to his labours by preaching the word of God to the Swedes. When Ansgar had been brought before the emperor and was asked by him if he was willing to take up this task, Ansgar answered readily that he was prepared to do anything that the emperor, in power of his authority, resolved to order him to do for Christ's sake.

Chapter 10

With the help of God's providence, the venerable abbot found a companion for Ansgar, namely a monk by the name of Witmar in your cloister, who was both suitable and willing to take up this mission. Further, he arranged that the good father Gislemar, a man approved by faith and good works and by his most fervent zeal for God, should go to be with King Harold. Then Ansgar embarked on the mission committed to him by the emperor, namely to travel to the land of the Swedes and find out if these people were prepared to accept the Christian faith, as the ambassadors had suggested. What great and difficult misfortunes he experienced on this journey, father Witmar who himself was on that trek can attest to. It is sufficient for us to say that they met up with Vikings when they had reached but half way on their journey.⁴ The merchants, who were travelling with them, defended themselves vigorously and, at first, were successful. However, in the end, they were conquered and overcome by the

Vikings who took the ships and everything that they had from them, and they themselves barely escaped to land on foot. Therefore, they lost the gifts the emperor had given to them to give to the Swedes, and everything else they had except a few small items which they were luckily able to carry with them when they had jumped from the ship. Among the items that were lost were nearly forty books, which they had gathered together for the service of God, but which were now in the hands of the Vikings. After this event, some wished to turn back, while others wanted to continue. But God's servant, Ansgar, could by no means be persuaded to relinquish the mission he had started. Quite the contrary, he committed everything that was going to happen to him into God's hands and decided not to turn back before he, through some sign from God, found out whether or not it was possible to preach in this land.

Chapter 11

With great difficulty, they accomplished their long journey on foot, travelling the intervening seas by ship whenever possible. They eventually arrived at the Swedish port called Birka.⁵ They were well received there by the king, who was called Björn.⁶ The king was informed by his messengers of the reason why they had come. After the king had heard the reason for their mission and had discussed the matter with his friends and all had given their approval and consent, he granted them permission to remain there and preach the Gospel of Christ. He also gave each who wanted permission to seek out their teachings. God's servants now saw with pleasure that they had luckily attained everything they had desired and began to proclaim the word of salvation for the people there. There were many who liked their message and willingly listened to teachings of the Lord. Furthermore, there were many Christian captives among them who rejoiced that they were able now at last to participate in the Holy Sacraments. Everything proved to be exactly as the ambassadors had told the emperor, and some of them earnestly wished to receive the grace of baptism. Among them was the town's prefect, a man named Herigar who was a councillor to the king and much beloved by him. He received the gift of holy baptism and was a most staunch believer in the Catholic faith. Later, this same man built a church on his familial estates and served God with the greatest piety. Many remarkable deeds were carried out by this man and there are many signs of his invincible faith, as we shall eventually clarify.

Chapter 12

[Ansgar returns to the emperor. By the consensus of the episcopate, Albia is formed into an archdiocese and the most holy father Ansgar is consecrated as its archbishop. Further, since this diocese was situated in a dangerous region, the monastery in Gaul, called Turholt, is subjugated to Ansgar.]

Chapter 13

[Through a directive from Rome, Pope Gregory IV (r. 827–44) confirms the foundation of the apostolic see not only by papal authority, but also by the gift of the pallium. Ansgar is appointed papal legate amongst the Swedes and the Danes, and also the Slavs and all peoples in the regions of the North. He is to share authority with Ebo, the archbishop of Rheims, who has also been entrusted with the same office.]

Chapter 14

[Gautbert is ordained a bishop and sent by Ebo to Sweden to preach to the king and his people. Ebo also gives Gautbert his monastery, Welanao, as a place of refuge.]

Chapter 15

[Ansgar takes up his duties as archbishop in his diocese and he begins to buy Danish and Slavic boys from slavery in order to train them for God's service.]

Chapter 16

[Viking marauders come to the town of Hamburg and the clerics and people are forced to flee. Everything used in the service of the church is pillaged or destroyed by fire.] Ansgar repeated again and again the words of the blessed Job: 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; the Lord's will be done. Blessed is the name of the Lord.'⁷

Chapter 17

After these incidents, the bishop and his people were plagued by distress and misfortune, and the brothers in his order wandered through various regions with the holy relics, and nowhere did they find rest on account of the devices of the wicked one. At this time also, at the instigation of the devil, the Swedes were taken by a fanatical fury against the bishop Gautbert and began to persecute him by insidious means. And so it happened that some of the people conspired and broke into the house that he lived in in order to plunder it. They killed his relative, Nithard, and, we believe, made him into God's martyr since they murdered him in hatred of Christianity. They bound Gautbert himself and those who were there with them. And after plundering everything they could find in the house, they drove them from their country with insults and abuse. This was not done with the king's consent, but came about as a plot devised by the people.

Chapter 18

God's mild majesty did not allow this crime to go unavenged, but almost all those who were present were soon punished, though in different ways. Much might be said concerning this, but in order not to tire the reader unnecessarily, we have decided to name only one person whose fate might show how the rest were also punished and their crimes avenged. There was a rich man in this country whose son had participated in this plot and taken his portion of the booty to his father's house. After this, his father's fortunes decreased and his flocks and family began to die off. Even his son was stricken by God's vengeance and died. Later, even his wife died, and a son and a daughter in short succession. When the man now saw that he had lost everything except a young son, he began to fear the anger of the gods and to imagine that he was suffering all these calamities because he had offended some god. Therefore, following the local customs, he went to a soothsayer and asked him to find out by casting lots which god he had offended and to tell him how he could appease the god. The soothsayer took all the measures that he was accustomed to observe in connection with such rites and answered that all the gods were well disposed to him, but the Christian god was incensed against him. 'Christ,' he said, 'has punished you. It is because there is

something consecrated to him hidden in your house. That is why you have been tormented by all these evils. And you will not be free of them as long as it remains in your house.' When he heard this, he considered anxiously what it might be, and he remembered that his son had brought a certain book as part of the booty mentioned above. Because of this he was stricken with fear and trembling, but since there were now no priests around, he did not know what to do with the book. Nor was he willing to have it in his home any longer.

At last the man came up with a plan and openly showed the book to the people who were in the same village and told them how he had suffered. Everyone told him that they did not know what to advise in this matter, and everyone was afraid to take the book or to keep it in their houses. The man was afraid to keep it any longer, and so he fastened it up carefully and tied it to a fence with a note telling anyone who wanted it to take it. For the offence he had committed, he also promised voluntarily to make amends with the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the Christians took the book and carried it to his own house. We understand this from his own statement. Later he showed such faith and devotion that he learned to say the psalms with us without reading them. In this same way the others were finally punished with death or sickness and loss of worldly possessions. It was clear to everyone that they had been most gravely punished by our Lord Jesus Christ because they had presumed to outrage and plunder God's holy bishop and his companions.

Chapter 19

For nearly seven years after this there was no priest in Sweden. The Lord and our father Ansgar were very downhearted and anxious about this. And since he could not bear that the Christian religion which had begun to be established there should perish, and because he grieved greatly for his dear son in Christ, Herigar, who has been named before, Ansgar sent a hermit named Ardgar into those parts and told him especially to help Herigar. When Ardgar arrived there, he was courteously received by Herigar and his presence brought great joy to the Christians who were there. And they began to do the things they had done before, namely to strive with fervour for God and observe with a willing mind the Christian rites. None of the unbelievers were able to resist his preaching because they remembered with fear the punishment which had come upon those who had expelled God's servants from there. On Herigar's suggestion, and with the then king's command and permission, he began to celebrate the sacraments in public.⁸

At the time when there was no priest there, the most faithful Herigar had endured many admonishments at the hands of the unbelievers, but because of divine grace and his own prayers, the true faith was proclaimed and accompanied by signs from the heavens. Some of these signs, as we promised above, we have added to the narrative in order to prove his invincible spirit of faith. On one occasion, a stage had been arranged for council on an open plain and he was sitting at the assembly. In the course of the discussion, some praised their own gods, by whose favour they had secured great prosperity, while others criticized him alone, who by accepting a worthless belief had set himself apart. Then he, being passionate in spirit, is said to have replied, 'If there is so much doubt about His divine majesty, which should not be doubted by anyone, let us prove who the more powerful is by a miracle, the many whom you call your gods or my one, the Almighty Lord Jesus Christ. Look, it is going to rain.' – a rain shower was imminent – 'Call on the names of your gods and ask for it not to rain on you, and I will ask my Lord Jesus Christ that not a drop of rain should touch me, and the one who answers the prayer is God.' This was mutually agreed on. They all sat on one side and he and one small boy sat on the other. They all began to pray to their own gods, and he prayed to the Lord Christ. Then a great stream of rain poured down from heaven, and they were so completely soaked that it seemed as though they had been thrown into a river with their clothes on. Even the leaves from the branches out of which the meeting place had been constructed fell in on them and proved to them that they were overcome by divine power. Not a single drop fell on Herigar and the boy who was with him. They were confused and astonished when this happened. 'You see,' said Herigar, 'who is God. Do not try to take me away from His worship, you unhappy men. Instead, be amazed and renounce the error of your ways; learn the way of the truth.'

On another occasion, Herigar had a great pain in his leg and could only move out of his place by being carried. After having endured this distress for some time, many people came to visit him and some tried to convince him to sacrifice to their gods in order to regain his health. Others taunted him with jeers, saying that his illness was due to the fact that he had no god. This, they repeated several times, and he resisted steadfastly their evil suggestions. And when he could bear their reproaches no longer, he replied that he would not look for aid from vain images but from his Lord Jesus Christ who, if He wished, could cure him of his sickness in a moment. Then he called for his servants and told them to carry him to his church. When he had been placed there, he poured out his prayers to the Lord in the presence of

all the bystanders, saying, 'My Lord Jesus Christ, grant to me Your servant my former health in this very moment, so that these wretches will know that You are the only God and that there is no God except You, and that Your enemies will be shown Your mighty works and will turn from the error of their ways to the knowledge of Your name. I beseech you, oh Lord, to do what I ask for the sake of Your holy name, which is blessed now and forever, that whosoever believes in You will not be confounded.' Immediately after saying this, he was healed by the grace God and became whole. Then unaided he walked out of the church and thanked God for his health. He was strengthened by the faith of Christ and confounded more and more the unfaithful.

At about this same time, a certain Swedish king named Anound had been driven out of his kingdom and was in exile among the Danes. He wanted to regain his kingdom, and was seeking aid from the Danes. He promised that if they would follow him he would reward them well. Anound offered them the aforementioned town Birka because there were a lot of rich merchants there, and an abundance of goods and money and treasure. He promised to lead them to a place where they could get what they wanted without great loss to their army. The Danes were enticed by the promise of gifts and eager to acquire treasure, and therefore they equipped twenty-one ships with men ready for battle and set sail with him. Besides these, he had eleven ships of his own. After leaving Denmark, they came without warning to Birka. The king was by chance far from town, and the chieftains and people were unable to meet together. Only Herigar, the prefect of this place, was there together with the merchants and the people who remained there. In this critical situation, they fled to a neighbouring town.⁹ They began to promise and offer their gods, who were demons, many pledges and sacrifices so that with their help they might escape this danger. But since the town was not terribly strong, and they themselves were too few to defend it, they sent out a messenger to the attackers to sue for peace and an alliance. King Anound told them to pay a hundred pounds of silver to ransom Birka. On those conditions they would get peace. They sent the required amount at once, and the king took the payment.

The Danes, however, were not pleased with this agreement because it had not gone as they had planned. They wanted to attack the place immediately and pillage and burn it completely. They pointed out that each of the merchants there owned more than they had offered them and that the Danes could not bear such a trick to be played on them. As they were discussing the matter and preparing to pillage the town to which the Swedes had fled, their plot became known to the people in the town. They gathered together then for a second time and, since

they had no power to resist and no hope of securing refuge, they urged each other to make pledges and to offer great sacrifices to their own gods. However, Herigar, the faithful servant of the Lord, was angry with them and said, 'Your vows and sacrifices to idols are accursed by God. How long will you serve devils and injure and impoverish yourselves by your useless vows? Look, you have made many offerings and more vows. You have given a hundred pounds of silver. How has it benefited you? Look, your enemies are coming to destroy all you have. They will take away your wives and sons as captives. They will burn your city and town and will destroy you by the sword. Of what use are your idols to you?'

With these words, they were all terrified. They did not know what to do, and they replied as one, 'Tell us your plan for our safety and we will not fail to do what you suggest.' Then he said to them, 'If you wish to make vows, make and perform your vows to the Lord God Almighty, who reigns in heaven and whom I serve with pure conscience and true faith. He is the Lord of all, and all things are subject to His will, nor can anyone resist His will. If you seek His help with all your heart, you will see that his almighty power will not disappoint.' They accepted his council, and as one and with free will they all went out to a field, as was their custom, where they all promised the Lord Christ to fast and give alms for their deliverance from the Danes.

Meanwhile, the king proposed to the Danes that they should cast lots to find out if it was the will of their gods to ravage this place. 'There are many great and powerful gods, and there was even a Christian church built there once. There are many people there who worship Christ, who is one of the strongest gods. He can help those who put their hope in him in any way he wishes. We must seek to determine whether it is the will of the gods that we are urged to do this thing.' This was in accord with their ways and they could not refuse it. In this manner, they sought to discover by casting lots the will of the gods. They determined that it would be impossible to achieve their goal without endangering their own welfare and that God would not permit this place to be taken by them. Further they asked where they should go to acquire riches for themselves so that they would not have to go home frustrated and empty handed. Then the lots showed that they should go to a certain town situated on a distant border to the Slavs.¹⁰ The Danes now believed that they had been given a divine order to retire from that place and hastened to go by a direct route to that other town. They suddenly attacked those people, who were living in peace and quiet, and seized it by force of arms. And after having captured much booty and treasure, they returned home. However, King Anound, who had come to plunder the

Swedes, made peace with them and gave back the money he had just taken from them. He stayed with them for a while since he wanted to reconcile with their people.

Thus, through his servant Herigar, the Lord in His mercy saved the people of this place from the attack of their enemies and restored their possessions. After these events, Herigar brought forth a proposal in the public assembly advising that they seek out who God was with more zeal, saying, ‘You wretches now must certainly understand that it is useless to seek help from demons who cannot assist those who are in trouble. Accept the faith of my Lord Jesus Christ who has proven to be the true God and who in His compassion has brought comfort to you who have no refuge from sorrow. Do not look to superstitious worship or appease your idols by useless sacrifice. Worship the true God who rules all things in heaven and earth, submit yourselves to Him, and adore His almighty power!’ He was more willing to come forth, both publicly and otherwise because his own faith had been strengthened by the abounding goodness of the Lord. He told them of the power of the Lord and the grace from faith in Him, sometimes by reproach and at other times by persuasion. In this way he continued the good fight until the end of his days. And when his good deeds were completed and his weakness had increased, he received Holy Communion and departed this life happily in Christ, having been commended to the mercy of God in the presence of the priest Ardgar. Much more might be said concerning his steadfast faith, but this must suffice since we desire our narrative to be brief.

Chapter 20

At that time there was also a very pious matron among the Swedes. The impudence of wicked men had been unable to turn her from the true faith. When she was placed in difficult positions, it was suggested to her that she should offer sacrifice to idols, according to their customs. However, she remained unmoved in her faith and did not abandon her duties. She said it was useless to pray for help to deaf and dumb images and that she considered it despicable to turn back to those whom she had renounced in baptism and abandon her promise to Christ. She said, ‘If it is an evil thing to lie to men, isn’t it even worse to lie to God? And if it is a good thing to remain faithful to each other, then doesn’t a person who has received the faith of the Lord have an obligation to remain steadfast in that faith and not to mix vanity with truth?’ She continued, ‘My Lord Jesus Christ is all powerful. If I continue to remain faithful to Him, He can give me health and everything I need according to His good will.’ This pious woman, named Frideborg, was deserving of praise for the goodness in

her life and remained faithful even to old age.

When she now thought that her death was upon her, and there was no priest in that place since the death of Gautbert, she yearned to receive the Christian sacrament of which she had heard, called the Eucharist. She had some wine that she had bought saved in a certain vessel. She then asked her daughter, who was also a woman devout in the faith, to drop some wine into her mouth when her last moments came, since she could not receive the sacrament, so that she might at least in this way commend her departure from this world to the mercy of the Lord. This wine she kept hidden for almost three years by which time the priest Ardgar had arrived there. After his appointment, she continued to perform piously her duties as long as she had the strength and asked him eagerly to celebrate the Mass and to preach sermons of salvation. Finally weakness overtook her and she became sick. In the face of her death, she became anxious and asked for the priest to be summoned. She received the Eucharist she had wished for from him, and she departed with joy to the Lord. She had always been intent on giving alms, and since she was rich in goods of this world, she had charged her daughter, named Catla, that she should distribute all her possessions among the poor after her departure from this life. She said, 'Since there are so few poor here, as soon as you have the chance, sell everything that has not been given away and take the money to Dorstadt. There are many churches, priests, and clergy there, and a multitude of poor people. When you arrive, seek out faithful people who can advise you how to distribute this money, and give everything away as alms for the benefit of my soul.'

After her mother had died, Catla promptly did everything her mother had told her to do. She took the journey to Dorstadt, and on her arrival she sought out some devout women who took her to the holy places in the town. They told her what to give each person. On one day, they were visiting the holy places for the sole purpose of giving charity and half had already been given away. Catla said to her companion, 'We are tired now. We had better buy some wine to refresh ourselves so we can finish the work we have begun.' She took out four denarii for the refreshments. They recovered their strength and finished their task. When the work was completed, Catla returned to her hostel and placed the empty sack, which had contained the money, in a certain place. When she later went to that place, she found that the sack was just as full as it had been before, due to a gift bestowed from above. Amazed by such a great miracle, she summoned those religious women who had gone with her and told them what had happened. In their presence, Catla counted the money that was now in the bag and found that it was the exact sum that she had

brought there except for the four denarii.

At the others' urging, Catla went to those priests seen as the most laudable in that place and told them what had happened. They gave thanks to God for His great goodness and said that the Lord had repaid her for her labours and intentions this way. They said, 'Since you have obeyed your mother and kept your pledge to her and accomplished her generous purpose by undertaking this toilsome journey, the Lord of all goodness, who repays and rewards, has given you this as a reward and as a contribution to your well-being. He is almighty and self-sufficient and needs nothing. In the kingdom of heaven, He will also repay everything that was given by the faithful in His name for the sake of the poor and His servants. By this miracle, our Lord has wanted to assure you that this is true, so that you will not doubt or regret having given away your fortune. And by this same sign, be assured that your mother is safe with the Lord. And admonished by this miracle, do not be afraid to give your property for the sake of Christ; rather know that the Lord will repay you in heaven. This is God's gift to you. You may do with the money in accordance with your own will. What you used for your own purpose, God has not restored, because in His kindness, He gave back only what had been given to the poor out of love for Him.'

After the death of Herigar, the priest Ardgar was moved by the desire to lead a solitary life as he had done before, and he departed those parts and sought out his own place. The Christians who lived here were deprived once again of the presence of a priest. In this way it became clear that the hermit Ardgar had been sent to this region in part to strengthen the faith of Herigar and in part to strengthen the faith of the matron mentioned above, and also that he might commend their departure to the mercy of God and that, in accordance with their constant desire, they might receive the sacrament of the Holy Communion to serve as their final *viaticum*.

Chapter 21

[Emperor Louis dies and King Charles takes possession of the monastery at Turholt and sets it free from bondage, which his father had ordained.]

Chapter 22

[The most gracious lord and ruler King Louis¹¹ arranges to give Ansgar Bremen as an episcopal see which was to include part of the neighbouring diocese and the town of Hamburg.]

Chapter 23

[The venerable Gunthar is consecrated archbishop of Cologne, to which the diocese of Bremen was subject, and he opposes the division of the diocese laid out by the emperor. Bishop Salomon, the bishop of Constanx, is sent to the apostolic see in order to promote the division. The venerable Pope Nicholas I confirms by his own authority the wishes of the emperor. Ansgar is authoritatively established as the first archbishop of Northalbing and legate among the surrounding races of Swedes, Danes, and Slavs (later manuscripts include the Faroes, Norway, Greenland, Iceland, and Finland).]

Chapter 24

[Archbishop Ansgar becomes friends with King Horik of Denmark and urges him to become a Christian. The king grants permission and allows Ansgar to build a church at Sliaswic (also known as Hedeby).]

Chapter 25

Meanwhile, our lord and father, Ansgar, was greatly distressed on behalf of the Swedish people because they were without a priest. He begged King Horic, his intimate friend, to help make an effort to reach this kingdom. The king supported this request with the greatest goodwill and promised to do everything he could to help. Ansgar began to discuss this issue with Bishop Gautbert, saying that a further attempt must be made to find out if this people who had been divinely chastised would permit priests to live with them, so that the Christian faith which had been established there would not die out by neglect. Bishop Gautbert, who was also called Simon, answered that since he had been driven out of that country, he would not go back and that to attempt such a journey could not be to any advantage, but it would be dangerous and people should remember what had happened earlier before raising a disturbance because of him. He said that it seemed to him more fitting for the one who had been the first to undertake this journey and who had been treated best there to go and that he would send his nephew with him. His nephew would remain there, if he found an opportunity to preach, and would perform the duties of priest among the people.

They agreed about this and sought King Louis and told him the reason for this action and asked him to permit this. Louis asked if they were in agreement on this. The venerable Bishop Gautbert replied,

saying: 'We are and have always been united in the service of God. It is our unanimous desire to do this.' The king, who was always ready to further God's work, charged our holy father with this mission. The king further gave Ansgar a personal message for the Swedish king, just as his father had done before him.

Our devout father then made preparations for the journey and was eager to accomplish it with the utmost speed. Furthermore, he believed he was commanded by heaven to undertake this mission. He was influenced by a vision he had previously had. In the vision he was very worried about the journey that he was about to undertake. He seemed to come to a place where there were big buildings and a number of different dwellings. In that place he met a man who said to him, 'Do not be afraid for this journey that you fear or that is in your thoughts. There is a certain prophet in this place who will tell you all about it. And so that no doubt will hang over you, I will tell you who the prophet is. It is the once renowned abbot, Adalhard, who now has been sent to you as a prophet by the Lord.¹² He will tell you what is about to happen.' Ansgar was greatly encouraged by what he heard in his vision, and said: 'Where will I find him, O Lord?' The reply was, 'You will find him by your own works, and no one is permitted to bring him to you.' Then it seemed to Ansgar that he went among the houses and looked for the prophet at the same time that he was contemplating this. 'If he will tell me what is on my mind without me asking him, then I will be satisfied that he is a real prophet.' He came then to a bright and beautiful house, and there he saw the prophet sitting on his throne, and he recognized him at once. The prophet looked at him and immediately said: 'Islands, listen to me, pay attention, remotest peoples. The Lord has called you before you were born, from your mother's womb he has pronounced your name. He made your mouth a sharp sword, and hid you in the shadow of His hand. He made you into a sharpened arrow, and concealed you in His quiver. He said to you, "You are my servant in whom I will be glorified."' Having said this, the prophet stretched out his arm and lifted his right hand to Ansgar. When Ansgar saw this he went up to his knees hoping that the prophet would be willing to bless him. And the prophet added, 'And now the Lord has spoken, he who formed you from the womb to be his servant, I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. Kings will stand up when they see you, and princes will bow, for the sake of the Lord God who has been faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.'

Now when God's servant had had this vision, long before the journey, he was convinced that it was God's will that he should go to those parts, especially with the words that had been said, 'Islands,

listen to me,' since most of that country consisted of islands, and also when, 'I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth,' was added, since the end of the world in the north was in Swedish territory. Finally the words quoted from the end of Jeremiah's prophecy: 'who has chosen you,' encouraged his eager desire since he thought that this referred to the crown of martyrdom that had been promised to him long before.¹³

Chapter 26

Ansgar then set out on his journey. He took with him the message and token given to him by King Horik. King Horik sent, namely, the following personal message to the Swedish king, named Olaf: the servant of God, who comes now to his land and is sent by King Louis, is well known by him, and that he had never seen in his whole life such a good person and he had never before met anyone so dependable. When he had got to know Ansgar's righteousness and goodness, he had allowed him to do whatever he wished to advance the Christian religion in his kingdom. He himself now asked that King Olaf would permit Ansgar to establish the Christian religion in his own kingdom in the same way, as he wished, since he did not want to do anything other than that which was right and good.

After spending nearly twenty days on a ship, Ansgar arrived at Birka, accomplishing the journey on which he had set out. He discovered that the king and a large number of the people were confounded by error. At the instigation of the devil who knew beforehand that this good man was coming, someone had come there and said that he had been present at the meeting of the gods who were believed to be the owners of this land, and he had been sent by them to announce to the king and the people, saying: 'You have long enjoyed our goodwill and protection, and with our help you have lived on your land with great abundance in peace and prosperity for a long time. You have also given us the sacrifices and vows that we have desired, and we appreciate your homage. But now you are holding back offerings, and you are displeasing us greatly by introducing a foreign god to supplant us. If you wish to enjoy our goodwill, give us the sacrifices that you have withheld from us and pay us greater vows. And you shall not accept the God from another culture, whose teaching goes against ours. Nor shall you pay attention to serving him. Furthermore, if you want to have more gods and we are not enough, we will agree to summon your former king, Eric, to join us so he may become one of the gods.'¹⁴ This devilish announcement, which was made public on the arrival of bishop Ansgar, greatly disturbed the minds of all, and great disquiet and

disillusionment took hold over the people. They built a temple in honour of the late king and began to make vows and give offerings to him as a god. When now the bishop came there, he asked some friends who had been there from before, how he should take up his mission with the king. Everyone advised him decisively and with assurance that he could affect nothing with his mission for the time being, and that if he had anything of value with him, he should give it to the king in order to escape with his life. He said, 'I would not give anything to save my life, because if my Lord wills it, I am ready to submit to torments and suffer death for His sake.' Since he was largely uncertain in regard to this matter, he acted on the advice he had been given, and invited the king to partake of his hospitality. As a fellow guest, Ansgar gave the king the finest gifts he could, those that had been entrusted to him. The reason for his coming had already reached the king by King Horik's messengers and the bishop's friends who lived there. The king was delighted with Ansgar's kindness and generosity, and said that he would gladly do what Ansgar advised. 'However,' he said, 'formerly there have been clerics here who were driven out by an uprising of the people and not by the command of the king. Therefore, I am neither able nor do I dare to approve your mission until I can consult our gods by casting lots and until I can ask the will of the people in regard to this matter. Your messengers can come with me to the next assembly, and I will talk to my people on your behalf. You may do what you ask if the gods consent and the people approve. If not, I will let you know.' It is their custom that every public matter is decided more by unanimous will of the people than that of the king's authority. Our most devoted father turned to the Lord for refuge when he heard the king's reply, and with heartfelt contrition he humbled himself before God.

Chapter 27

Ansgar was in a difficult position as the time of the assembly drew near. One day he was performing the service of Mass and the priest was standing by the altar blessing the Holy Sacraments.¹⁵ An inspiration from heaven came on Ansgar as he prostrated himself on the ground. Then he was strengthened by the Holy Spirit and was seized with the most complete confidence. He knew that all would turn out as he desired. After the Mass, he told the priest who was close to him in all things that he did not need to have the slightest trepidation, since God's grace was with him. When the priest asked him how he knew this, Ansgar answered that it had been made clear to him through divine inspiration. The monk recognized Ansgar's spiritual inspiration, since he had seen many earlier signs that Ansgar

had been comforted by God. His confidence was justified almost at once as things developed. The king called first his chieftains and began to discuss our father Ansgar's mission with them. They decided to enquire by casting lots to find out what the gods thought about this. They went out into a field, as was their custom, and cast lots. The lot decided that it was the will of God that the Christian religion should be established there. One of the chieftains, who was a friend of the bishop, at once told him to be comforted. He said, 'Be strong and act with vigour. God has not denied your wish nor rejected your mission.' Then Ansgar found courage and with joyful spirits exulted in the Lord.

The day of the assembly came and it was held in Birka. As was the custom, the king made a proclamation to the people through a herald to inform them about the object of their mission. The people who had been led into error held discordant and confused opinions when they heard this. In the midst of the noise and tumult one of the older men among them said, 'Listen to me your majesty and my people. In regard to the worship of this God, it is well known to many of us that He can offer much of help to those who place their hope in Him. Many of us have found this to be the case on several occasions when in peril on the sea and in other crises. Why do we reject that which we know to be both useful and serviceable? On several occasions some of us have been in Dorstadt and have adopted this form of religion of our own accord, believing it to be beneficial. Now there are many who threaten our way there and the route is made dangerous by Viking attacks. Why don't we take what seemed so appealing when it was far away and is now brought to us? Why shouldn't we gladly agree to continue as His servants, when we have frequently found that help from this God can be useful to us? People, consider carefully and do not throw away what will be to your advantage. Since we cannot be sure that our own gods will favour us, it is good to have the help of this God who is always, and under all circumstances, able and willing to support those who cry out to Him.'¹⁶ When he had finished his speech, the gathering was united and decided that they would allow a priest to live among them and that everything that pertained to the Holy Sacraments would be permitted without hindrance.

The king rose up at the assembly and, at once, sent his own messenger together with the bishop's messenger to tell Ansgar that the people had unanimously accepted his will. The king said, however, that, though he valued their decision, he could not yet give Ansgar definitive permission until he had announced this resolution to the inhabitants in another part of his kingdom at another assembly that was to be held there. Again our father of blessed memory sought for divine assistance, as was his custom, and eagerly prayed for God's mercy. The time for that assembly came. Through the herald, the king

proclaimed why the bishop had come and everything that had been said and done at the previous assembly. By divine providence, the hearts of all there became as one and they adopted the resolution that had passed the former assembly and declared that they would give their entire and complete consent.

Chapter 28

[Ansgar is told of the outcome of the assembly and preparations are made to build churches. Bishop Gautbert's nephew is left there to perform the sacraments. Ansgar prepares to return from Sweden.]

Chapter 29

While he was preparing for his departure, our most holy father Ansgar saw in advance the mental and spiritual anguish he would have during his journey through a revelation from our Lord. He had a vision one night that the time had come for the Passion of our Lord and that he himself was present when our Lord Jesus Christ was led from Pilate to Herod and then back to Pilate. Christ endured being spat on and jeered at by the Jews and the soldiers and tortured all over. In his dream, Ansgar would not allow Him to be punished in this way, but rather gave his own back to the torturers and received the blows that had been meant for Him. Only Christ's head was not protected by Ansgar because He was taller of stature than him.

Christ's invincible soldier did not understand what this meant until his return journey, when he considered how much insult and mockery he had borne and in what jeopardy he had been placed and what blasphemies against God he had endured there. As far as he was concerned, he had undoubtedly suffered there on Christ's behalf and Christ, through his servant, bore again the reproaches that were directed against Him. That he could not protect Christ's head symbolized the fact that the suffering that the saints endure in this world on Christ's behalf fall in part on God's own majesty, for the head of Christ is God. God in His sympathy endures them for a time, but one day he will judge severely, as it is written: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.'¹⁷

Chapter 30

Nor shall we forget to mention how the power of the Lord was manifested to the Swedes after the journey was completed. A certain

people named Courlanders, who lived far from the Swedes, were subjugated by them.¹⁸ They had a long while since rebelled and refused to be subjugated. The Danes knew this. And when the bishop came to Sweden, they had gathered together a great fleet and sailed off to Courland, eager to seize their goods and subjugate the Courlanders to themselves. There were five towns in their kingdom. When the inhabitants now heard that the Danes had arrived, they gathered together in one place and resisted bravely and defended their property. They were victorious and massacred half the Danes and plundered their ships, getting their gold and silver and other goods.

When King Olaf and the Swedes heard this, they wanted to win for themselves the reputation that they could do what the Danes could not. And because this people had been previously subjugated to them, they gathered together an immense army and proceeded to Courland. First they came to a city in their country called Seeburg.¹⁹ There were seven thousand well armed men there. They ravaged and plundered it thoroughly and burned it to the ground. They left it with lifted spirits. They sent away their ships and set out with wild enthusiasm on a five-day journey and came to another town called Apulia.²⁰ In this town there were fifteen thousand armed men. When the Swedes came there, the inhabitants shut themselves up in the town. The Swedes began to lay siege to the town from without and the Courlanders bravely defended from within. This went on for eight days, though they waged war from morning to night and many fell on both sides, but no one won victory. On the ninth day the Swedish army became exhausted by the daily slaughter and they were beginning to get worried and began to consider how they might extricate themselves. They said, 'We have nothing to win here and our ships are a long way away.' As has already been said, it was a five-day trek back to where they had harboured their ships.

They were very disturbed and did not know what they should do. They decided to cast lots to find out if their gods were willing to help them, to see if they would win a victory, or at least get away with their lives. They cast lots, but could not find any god willing to help them. 'What should we unhappy people do?' they said. 'The gods have left us and none of them is willing to help us. Where shall we flee to? Our ships are such a long way away, and if we flee, our enemies will follow us and kill us to the last man. What kind of hope do we have?' In that dark hour, some merchants remembered the teaching and instruction given to them by the bishop and offered them advice, saying: 'The God of the Christians frequently helps those who cry to Him and His help is all powerful. We will enquire if He is willing to be on our side, and with a glad heart we will offer Him vows that will be agreeable to Him.' Unanimously they agreed and cast lots again and

discovered that Christ was willing to help them. When this had been made public knowledge, everyone regained his courage so that they were ready at once to renew the attack on the town without fear. 'What do we need to fear or dread now? Christ is with us. Let us fight and behave like men. Nothing can stand against us. We cannot fail to gain the victory because we have the mightiest of the gods as our helper.'

The whole force gathered together. They attacked the town with courage and joy of spirit. When they had encircled the town and were eager to start the fight, a message came from the people in the town to speak with them. The Swedish king agreed and the townspeople said, 'We would rather have peace than war, and we wish to enter into an agreement with you. First, we are prepared to give you all the gold and arms that we took as spoil from the Danes last year for the sake of securing an alliance with you. Also, we offer one half pound of silver for each person in the town. Further we are willing to pay you the tribute that we used to pay and will give you hostages because we want to be subject and obedient to your rule as we were in former times from this day forward.' Despite the offer, the young warriors could not control themselves. They became even more inflamed and undaunted and wanted nothing other than to wage war. They said they would destroy the town and everything the people had, and would carry the people off as slaves. However, the king and chieftains were more level-headed and accepted their offer and they entered into an agreement with them. They gladly returned home taking with them countless treasures and thirty hostages.

When at length peace had been established between the two peoples, the Swedes praised your Lord Christ's omnipotence and glory and declared that He was greater than all other gods. They began to think with solicitude about what they should give the One who had given them their victory. At the suggestion of some of the Christian merchants who were there at that time, they promised to observe a fast that would be acceptable to the Lord Christ. Everyone was to abstain from eating meat for seven days after they had been home for seven days. And after forty days, they would all abstain from eating meat for the forty days following that. And this they did. Everyone who had been with them agreed to this. Afterward, there were many who, on account of reverence and love for Christ, began to pay special attention to the fasts observed by Christians, and to almsgiving, and they began to help the poor because they had learned that it was pleasing to Christ. In this way, the priest Erimbert was free to perform everything having to do with the services of God and as long as everyone valued God's power, the Christian religion began to grow ever stronger in those areas without meeting opposition from anyone.

Chapter 31

Meanwhile it happened that, by divine judgment, King Horik was killed in war during an attack by Vikings in connection with an invasion of his kingdom by a few of his relatives. Those who were friends and acquaintances of Bishop Ansgar, all the chieftains of that land, fell with him by the sword. Horik the younger was installed as king. Some of his chief men, who were not so well known to the bishop, tried to persuade the king to tear down the church that was there and to abolish the Christian religion that had been established. They said that their gods were angry and that this great evil had come on them because they had accepted the worship of another and unknown god. The count of the village of Slesvig, named Hovi, who was especially opposed to this religion, urged the king to destroy the Christian faith. He ordered the church that had been built there shut and forbade the observance of the Christian religion. The priest who was in the town departed due to this bitter persecution.

Chapter 32

Bishop Ansgar became very anxious and deeply distressed. At King Horik the Younger's court, he did not have any of the friends whose loyalty he had acquired with magnificent gifts and who could now help him win over the king for the Lord. Since he had now no human help, he hastened to seek divine assistance, as was his custom. Nor was he disappointed in his hope. The Lord consoled him with spiritual comfort, and he became completely convinced that the Christian faith that had been established in that place would never perish, as the enemies of Christ were planning. With the help of the Lord, this consolation was soon confirmed. When Ansgar prepared to travel to the king because of this matter, he was forestalled by the grace of the Lord. Before Ansgar could leave, the king expelled the count from the town without ever taking him in his graces again. Then, of his own accord, he sent a messenger to the lord bishop asking him to send back his priest to his church. The king assured him that he, no less than Horik the Elder, wished to deserve Christ's favour and to obtain the friendship of the lord bishop. Our venerable shepherd Ansgar went himself to the king with the help of the most illustrious count Burghard. Burghard had also helped him earlier with Horik the Elder in all matters and had a lot of influence with both kings since he was of their kin. Ansgar was graciously received by King Horik the Younger. The king immediately promised to permit Ansgar to carry out all actions that his predecessor had wanted for the benefit of

Christendom in his kingdom. Furthermore, he allowed a bell to be put in the church, which the pagans regarded as unlawful. He also gave a site in another village in his kingdom, called Ripa,²¹ for the building of a church and granted permission for a priest to be installed there.

Chapter 33

[Bishop Gautbert sends Ansfrid to Sweden but Ansfrid returns when Bishop Gautbert dies. Ragembert and Rimbert are sent in replacement.]

Chapters 34–42

[Despite difficulties, Ansgar does not abandon the mission in the North. The spiritual fervour of Ebo, archbishop of Rheims, who helps in this task, affords him some comfort. Ansgar continues to have visions. He trains slaves he purchased from the Northmen and Slavs to work in the monasteries and is critical of the North Albingians taking slaves. He heals some people through his prayers, and submits patiently to his own final illness. At the end of his life, Ansgar worries about the fate of his mission to the pagans. He takes the sacrament of Holy Communion, and says over and over, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner,’ and ‘O Lord, into Your hands I commit my spirit.’²² Finally, worn out by his illness, he dies. He is extolled as an example of holy living and is assured among God’s martyrs in heaven.]

NOTES

- 1 Louis the Pious was the son of Charlemagne.
- 2 The Frisian city near modern Utrecht (Wijk te Duerstede). The city gained great importance for the Nordic countries during Christianization.
- 3 Dreves in *Leben des heiligen Ansgar* (1864) suggests this is a reference to shaving his tonsure, not his beard.
- 4 The exact word in Latin is pirate (*pyratas*), but given where they were and the time period, they were undoubtedly Viking marauders.

- 5 Birka, modern Swedish Björkö, was a town in Sweden that lies near modern Stockholm and has been extensively excavated during the last two decades.
- 6 Björn II, son of Erik I, was king of Sweden.
- 7 Job 1:21.
- 8 Waitz suggests that this implies that Björn II was no longer king, and that this was probably his brother, Anound.
- 9 Probably the town of Sigtuna.
- 10 No one really knows which town is meant here. Some scholars suggest Bineta on the Island of Wollin off the Polish coast, whereas others suggest Novgorod in modern day Russia. For logistic reasons, the former may be more likely.
- 11 Louis the Pious's son.
- 12 Adalhard was the grandson of Charles Martel and became the abbot of Corbie, where Ansgar was a young monk. He died in 826.
- 13 Rimbert is wrong here. This quote comes not from Jeremiah, but from Isaiah 49:1–7, though the person is changed from first to second and some lines omitted.
- 14 This is probably Eric III, a predecessor of the aforementioned Björn.
- 15 Klippel identifies this priest as Rimbert himself.
- 16 This passage is very similar to a passage found in Bede's *Ecclesiastic History of the English Church*.
- 17 Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30.
- 18 Courland is in modern day Latvia.
- 19 This might be Seleburg on the River Duna.
- 20 This is probably the town of Pilten on the River Windawa.
- 21 The site, called later Ribe, became the seat of a diocese in 948. The priest, according to Adam of Bremen, was named Rimbert, but was probably not the same Rimbert who wrote this *Life*,

since that Rimbert was not yet a priest.

[22](#) Luke 18:13 and 23:46 respectively.

Sts Sunniva and Henrik: Scandinavian Martyr Saints in Their Hagiographic and National Contexts

THOMAS A. DUBOIS

Two of the earliest saints of Scandinavia are migrant martyrs from the British Isles. In the tenth-century Sunniva settled on the island of Selja in coastal Norway, where, according to her legend, a landslide took her life, saving her from a crueler death at the hands of Jarl Hákon's soldiers, when angry pagan neighbours suspected her and her companions of cattle theft. Sometime later, in 996, the newly ensconced King Olaf Tryggvason erected a church at the cave's mouth in her honour; it became a popular site of pilgrimage and eventually – in expanded form – a bishop's seat. The twelfth-century English cleric Henrik is said to have accompanied Nicholas Breakspear to Scandinavia in 1151, helped King St Eric IX of Sweden undertake his conquest and conversion of western Finland several years later, and then died at the hands of an impenitent convert as he crossed the frozen Lake Köyliö in 1158. The route of his final journey as well as the church that held his remains became popular pilgrimage destinations, drawing pilgrims and church endorsement even after the Reformation. When viewed from the modern vantage points of nation and identity, these legends, with their foreign heroes, home-grown villains, peripheral locations, and agricultural details, present a rather puzzling image of Christianization and the role of the cult of the saints in early Scandinavian religiosity. Yet when viewed within the context of medieval hagiography, the stories of these saints map nicely developments and shifts in the life cycle of a saint's cult. This chapter attempts to contextualize the legends and veneration of Sunniva and Henrik within the martyrology of the medieval period and demonstrate how successive stages in the development of their cults spell, on the one hand, the decline in the cult of Sunniva in Norway and, on the other hand, the survival of the cult of Henrik in Finland. Key to the developments are changing notions of *periphery* and *centre* in Western Christianity, the role of episcopal sees as focuses of power and local identity, and the emergence of 'national' consciousness during the late Middle Ages and Reformation. Below I first present what we know about the saints on the basis of their *vitae* and other

historical documents. I then survey the history of their cults from the point of view of five stages through which they passed. A comparison at each stage helps clarify the similarities and differences between these two saints and their cults.

The Saints as We Know Them

Sunniva

The earliest mention of a saint's cult in the area of western Norway comes in Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* of the late eighth century (1974). In book I, [chapter 4](#) of that work, Paul writes of a remote cave on the far northwestern shore of the Germanic territories, where seven men in Roman dress repose in suspended animation, awaiting a time when, perhaps, they are to revive and preach the Gospel to the savage Scritobini, apparently the Sámi. For ease of reference this account is reproduced below, although it has little apparent connection with what eventually becomes known as the Sunniva legend:

In the farthest boundaries of Germany towards the north-north-west, on the shore of the ocean itself, a cave is seen under a projecting rock, where for an unknown time seven men repose wrapped in a long sleep, not only their bodies but also their clothes being so uninjured, that from this fact alone, that they last without decay through the course of so many years, they are held in veneration among those ignorant and barbarous peoples. These then, so far as regards their dress, are perceived to be Romans. When a certain man, stirred by cupidity, wanted to strip one of them, straightway his arms withered, as is said, and his punishment so frightened the others that no one dared touch them further. The future will show for what useful purpose Divine Providence keeps them through so long a period. Perhaps those nations are to be saved some time by the preaching of these men, since they cannot be deemed to be other than Christians. (6–7)

In his translation of the *Historia*, Foulke (1974, 6) notes that Paul has here relocated a Mediterranean legend known under the title 'The

Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.’ In the legend as it occurs in other sources, the seven men are sealed in a cave near Ephesus when they flee a Roman emperor (originally Decius, in the year 250) who desires to force them to make sacrifices to pagan deities. They awaken two centuries later, after the conversion of the Empire, wander about in confusion and die. At an even earlier remove, this legend may have grown out of a simple note in *Acts*, in which Paul meets followers of John the Baptist at Ephesus and converts them to Christianity: ‘They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and the moment Paul had laid hands on them the Holy Spirit came down on them, and they began to speak with tongues and to prophesy. There were about twelve of these men in all’ (*Acts* 19: 5–7). That these seven, or twelve, men become located along the Norwegian coast in Paul’s geography signals most probably that by his time a legend of holy relics had already become localized to the area and had become known farther afield.

In a scholium (note) that Adam of Bremen added to his masterwork *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (*History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*) sometime after the year 1076 (*Gesta Hammaburgensis* 2002, xxviii), Adam seems to recognize the legend and location that Paul had noted and adds further details to the account. In his note (scholium 145), Adam writes:

Paul affirms in his *History of the Lombards* that in a cavern off the ocean in the farthest northern parts among the Skritefingi seven men lie as if asleep. About them there are divergent opinions, including the belief that they are going to preach to those heathen about the time the world will end. Others say that some of the Eleven Thousand Virgins came to this region and that their attendants and ships are buried in a mountain and that miracles are wrought there. In that place Olaf also built a church. (213)

Scholars have assumed that Adam refers here to Selja, although he does not mention the island by name any more than Paul does. The perpetual sleep of the seven men disappears as a detail in the legend after Adam, as does any mention of potential missionization among the Sámi. What does remain in later accounts is the reference to the Eleven Thousand Virgins, female martyrs who were associated with the Church of St Ursula in Cologne. Adam is either suggesting that some subset of the eleven thousand came north to Selja before their deaths, or that the legend itself seems to have wandered from Germany to Scandinavia. The mention of a church erected on the site by King Olaf further ties this reference to Selja and later accounts,

although Adam refers to King St Olaf in particular, while later texts credit his predecessor Olaf Tryggvason with the building of the church. In any case, as Adam notes, opinions of the saints of Selja are still ‘divergent’ as far as he can tell, with no single cult having as yet emerged, despite the clear effort of Olaf to endorse or shape one on the island.

It has been the practice of modern historians writing of both St Sunniva and St Henrik to cast as much doubt as possible on the actual existence of the saints in question, the veracity of their legends, and the antiquity of their cults. Thus, in the case of Sunniva, for example, Aarne Odd Johnsen (1968) goes to great lengths to advance the theory that the original tradition concerning holy relics on Selja referred only to undifferentiated sainted people, as indicated in corporate titles like breviary references to ‘Acta Sanctorum in Selia’ or the 8 July feast day ‘Seljumannamessan’ in church calendars (40–1). Adam’s failure to include the name Sunniva is used as proof that no such saint was known at his time. Onomastic evidence, however, indicates that Sunniva was a relatively familiar name in eleventh-century England (notes to *Acta Sanctorum in Selio*, xxxxi), and it is not unlikely, according to Hommedal, that a Christian colony including an anchorite by that name could have settled on Selja sometime after the early eighth century (1996, 119–20). Further, the legend of the Eleven Thousand Virgins, mentioned by Adam – although quite variable in detail, as we shall see – never occurs without some reference to a female leader. From this point of view, it is not only possible but even likely that a tradition of a holy anchorite having lived on Selja with a following of equally devoted companions was already well established by the time Adam wrote in the eleventh century.

The most detailed Latin account of the *Acta Sanctorum in Selia* (Icelandic MS AM670qv; *Acta Sanctorum in Selio* 1880, 147–52), dated to the late twelfth century, as well as the more abbreviated account in the *Breviarium Nidrosiense* add a wealth of details to this initial sketch of the Selja saints. It is translated in full in the texts section of this chapter. Here we learn that Sunniva (despite her English name) was an Irish princess, one who inherited the throne of her father’s kingdom after his death. When a frustrated would-be suitor king begins to harry and plunder her land in retribution for her refusal to marry him, Sunniva decides to abdicate, sailing away in three ships with a large following of men and women. Trusting in God to guide them, they arrive in Selja and in Kinn, where they establish a colony on islands used only as pasture for the livestock of local (pagan) farmers. Fishing for sustenance, the colony prospers until distrustful farmers suspect them of cattle theft. The farmers appeal to the heathen ruler of Norway Jarl Hákon, who journeys to Selja with an

armed force to put an end to the colony. On seeing their enemy's approach, the colonists flee into their cave and ask God to preserve them from defilement by burying them there. A landslide answers their prayers, sealing them off from Hákon and his troops, who depart in bewilderment, unable to find the Christians.

Sometime later, in 996, after King Olaf Tryggvason's ascent to the throne, two pagan merchants pass by the island and are attracted to it by a strange light shining from above. On following the light to its destination on Selja, they find a glowing head, which they take with them on their further journey. They arrive at Olaf's court, are convinced to convert, and display the head to Olaf and his bishop. On the basis of this and other testimony coming from travellers passing the islands, the bishop advises Olaf to investigate the island himself. There they find the well-preserved bones of the saints amid the odour of sanctity and, under the bishop's advice, Olaf has a church erected and consecrated at the mouth of the cave. Sunniva's body is recovered incorrupt and placed in a shrine, which, the account tells us, was kept in Selja until its translation to Bergen in 1170.

The legend also passed into vernacular literature through the translation of Odd's Latin *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* into Old Norse sometime around the year 1200. Odd's version recounts King Olaf's role in the story first (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar eftir Odd Munk* 1957, 80–3), supplying names for the merchants who bring the matter to the king's attention (Þórðr Jórunnarson and Þórðr Ægileifarson),¹ and recounting the king's journey to Selja with his bishop. The church erected there and a similar one on Kinn are said to have been sites of numerous miracles for pilgrims travelling to them down to the text's present day. From there, Odd's text moves backwards to recount the story of Sunniva herself along with a brother Albanus who is said to have travelled with her to the island and died there as well (83–5). Sunniva, an Irish princess, is said to have rejected a *hervíkingr*'s (Viking's) proposal of marriage because he was a pagan. The colonists' deaths in the landslide follow as in the earlier Latin texts, and now, Odd notes, Sunniva's relics were eventually translated to Bergen while her brother's remained in the hands of monks on the island. In fact, of course, St Alban died far earlier, in the year 304, a victim of the persecution of Christians under Diocletian (Delaney 1980, 305). His remains were preserved at St Albans, in Hertfordshire, but his head had indeed been brought to Selja by a community of Benedictines who founded the Monastery of St Alban on the island sometime in the early eleventh century. Storm (notes to *Acta Sanctorum in Selio*, xxxiv) rightly notes that the confusion in Odd's text indicates that Odd received his information at a distance from the island itself, certainly sometime after Sunniva's relics had been translated to Bergen.

Snorri's *Heimskringla* makes no mention of Sunniva or the island of Selja, even though it pays close attention to the missionary efforts of King Olaf Tryggvason. Later expansions of Snorri's text, however, such as the version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* written down by Jón Þórðarson in *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol.) around 1380, restore the account of Sunniva, placing it in more chronological order with Sunniva's *vita* before Olaf's discovery of her relics, as in the earlier Latin accounts (*Flateyjarbók* 1944, 1:267–71). Sunniva is again described as an Irish princess who rejects the suit of a *víkingr*, but she does so now because of her desire to lead a celibate lifestyle: 'to serve God in chastity and marry no man in this world' (at þjóna guði einum í hreimlífi ok eiga engan mann á jarðríki).² Later in the account she is referred to as *guðs bruðr* (a bride of God, *Flateyjarbók* 1:270). The account of Olaf retains the Old Norse names of the merchants, but corrects Odd's mistaken ideas about St Alban, noting that the latter died in England and had been translated to the island by the Benedictines. The text also mentions a healing spring that had arisen at the site of the cave itself and describes Olaf's church on the island as impressively large and frequented by many pilgrims.

Scholars have noted similarities between the legend of St Sunniva and those of both St Ursula and the English St Modwenna. The cult of St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins centred on the Church of St Ursula at Cologne, which, according to a fourth- or fifth-century Latin inscription, was said to have been raised to restore a still earlier basilica erected to mark the site of martyrdom of these holy women of the past (Poncelet, 1912). Liturgical texts from later centuries mention a feast in honour of the virgins of Cologne (21 October), and by the ninth century, we begin to have more detailed accounts of their lives and martyrdom. In the legend as it emerges, St Ursula is the daughter of a Christian king of England, whose hand is sought in marriage by a powerful pagan king. She obtains a stay of three years, during which she and a troop of other virgins live on board ships off the coast of England. Just before her time of reprieve has ended, however, a gale drives the ships to Cologne, where the women disembark, travel to Rome, and then return, winning martyrdom at the hands of pagan Huns. In a competing legend, recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Ursula is said to have been the daughter of a Cornish king, Dionotus. When the conquering Romans demand wives for their invading army and colonists in Brittany, Dionotus sends his daughter, along with eleven thousand noble virgins and sixty thousand other women. A storm blows them to Germany instead, however, where they are slain by Huns and Picts.

St Modwenna's story is harder still to clarify, since the legends of several saints with similar or identical names in England and Ireland became conflated over time. One of these, the early sixth-century St Daerea (also known as St Monnina) was said to be of royal background and served as abbess of the Abbey of Killeavy (Cell Sléibhe Cuillen) in Armagh (Johnsen 1968, 59; Delaney 1980, 411). Another, a seventh-century St Modwenna (also called Moninne or Merryn), was said to have lived as an anchorite on the island of Andresey in the Trent River. Her feast, 6 July, is close to that of St Sunniva, 8 July. Johnsen (1968, 59) goes so far as to conjecture that the name for St Sunniva itself arose from a clerical misreading of a similar-looking name like Moninna. In eleventh-century legends of the saint, she is said to have been the daughter of an Irish king, who rejected the offer of marriage of a robber baron, drew a troop of chaste virgins around her, and travelled abroad with them to Britain. There she raised a number of churches, particularly in the area of southern Scotland.

Although the parallels between these various legends and that of St Sunniva are noteworthy, it is also important to point out the ways in which the Sunniva legend as we have it differs from these counterparts. Unlike typical accounts of St Ursula, or indeed of many female martyrs, Sunniva has no conflicts with her father. The Latin account of her life makes it clear that her father approved of her Christian holiness and encouraged the saintly life she chose to live. More typically in the martyr legends, the female saint's choice of chastity is strenuously resisted by the father, who wishes to marry the daughter off to a wealthy or powerful ally or who fails to understand the principles of Christianity. In the most extreme version of such a legend – that of the roughly contemporaneous St Dymphna, the pagan king desires to enter into an incestuous relationship with his daughter after the death of his queen (Kirsch 1909). According to her eleventh-century legend, St Dymphna, also an Irish princess, flees her father's attentions and settles beside a chapel dedicated to St Martin at Gheel, near Antwerp. Her father discovers her whereabouts and beheads her, sealing her body in a cave, where it is rediscovered only later. In contrast to this account, or any of the legends of St Ursula or St Modwenna, St Sunniva is not brutalized or murdered for withholding sexual favours, nor is she directly murdered by pagans. Rather, she dies in a landslide intended by God to preempt her persecution at the hands of Jarl Hákon's troops. These details, in fact, render Sunniva a far more empowered and self-possessed figure than the martyr saints with which she is usually compared and indicate possible differences in the nature of the cult that grew up around her cave. It is a cult that focuses not on Sunniva's choice of chastity but rather on the struggle

to create a Christian enclave at the edge of a pagan society. Most salient is this theme of peripherality: Sunniva's place of life and martyrdom maps the edge of the Christian world at the time, the boundary between Norway's last pagan and first Christian rulers, and the shift from a world of suspicion, marked by violence, to one of faith, marked by miracles. From this point of view, other elements of possible source legends – both that of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and of the martyrdom of St Ursula and her troop at the hands of the Huns – emerge as important, underscoring the same idea: that of dedicated Christians dying at what originally was a periphery of the Christian world but which becomes, through the saint's relics, a central site of pilgrimage and holiness in a now-Christianized realm. In this way, St Sunniva's legend reinforces powerfully the use which King Olaf Tryggvason and his English bishop Sigurð made of it in establishing Christianity in Norway. It is thus noteworthy that her original feast commemorates not her martyrdom (as is usual in such cults) but the date of the dedication of King Olaf's church in her honour.

Henrik

St Henrik can be said to have lived in much the same religious and historical context as St Sunniva. He, too, is said to have come to Scandinavia from England, serving at first as the bishop of Uppsala in the early 1150s. When King St Eric undertook a crusade to conquer and convert western Finland, Henrik is said to have accompanied him, establishing the faith on this eastern periphery of Christendom. Accounts of St Henrik, and of King St Eric's crusade, however, date only from the 1280s, arising at about the same time in both Uppsala and Turku (Jokipii 1989, 93). No textual evidence before these manuscripts attest to a bishop of Uppsala by the name of Henrik or to a Swedish crusade at this time (Suvanto 1985, 153; Anttonen 1997, 3), although a Bishop Henrik is attested for Uppsala's predecessor see at Sigtuna. Nonetheless, the texts left to us regarding Henrik are very concrete about his existence, his sanctity, and his martyrdom. After a period of marked scepticism regarding the saint, scholarly consensus now holds that Henrik probably did exist, even if the region in which he worked was almost certainly already well on the road toward Christianization at the time of his ministry (Salo 2000, Heikkilä 2005). According to the legend as recounted in the early sixteenth-century *Breviarum aboense* (1957, 44–61) – a copy of earlier liturgical texts that provided the proper for his feast – Henrik had already

distinguished himself in Sweden by his holy and honest life. After Eric's return to Sweden, Henrik chooses to remain behind with his new converts, trading a life of power and ease for one of simplicity and hardship. In this sense, Henrik falls into the same category as Olaf Tryggvason's Bishop Sigurð, and his legend, like Sunniva's, helps map the once-perilous periphery of the Christian world.

A year later, however, Henrik's life is cut short by a truculent convert, who resents the chastisement he has received from Henrik for a murder he committed. The angry man lashes out and murders Henrik in revenge. Henrik thus becomes like the biblical Abel, murdered by a man who rejects the justice and authority of God. As the Latin antiphon puts it:

Faced with justice, the man was pained:
Impenitent, with hands blood-stained.
His church's discipline disdained;
He boldly raved and raged that day,
And struck to death his blameless prey.

With palm of victory held on high
The bishop passes stately by
Crossing to the palace divine.

*(Breviarum aboense, 50)*³

The account continues to relate how the murderer lifts the bishop's mitre from his victim's head and places it on his own, returning home in triumph. When he later attempts to remove the headdress, however, he finds that it has become affixed firmly to his head, so that, in tearing it away, the man also tears asunder his hair and scalp, leaving him to die a painful death. Later, one of the martyr's severed fingers – still identifiable by its bearing the bishop's ring – is recovered from a piece of drift ice on the melting Lake Köyliö, where the murder had occurred. Its preservation from sinking is seen as a sign of God's will to preserve for veneration the relics of the holy bishop.

In a native Finnish ballad of St Henrik (translated below), the earliest manuscript of which dates from around 1670, several more details of the saint's legend are included. The evil-doer is now given a name – Lalli (a derivative of the Christian name Lawrence) – and his fury at the saint is now attributed to the lies of his mean-spirited wife Kerttu, who claims that Henrik and his servant had enjoyed hospitality at Lalli's farm without paying recompense. Her threat to Henrik reflects her venomous nature:

Evil woman, cursed one

Gluttonous and sour
Shrieked out from the oven side
Hollered from the hearth:
'Wait till Lalli gets back home,
He'll soon shake up your bones,
He'll soon throttle your head,
Scattering your sinews!'

(Piispa Henrikin Surmavirsi)

Enraged by the lies his wife tells him, Lalli pursues the bishop, who prophetically foresees his own death and advises his servant to hide. The servant is to emerge after Henrik's death to gather up his body parts, place them in an ox-drawn cart, and send the ox on its way. Where the ox comes to rest, there a church is to be erected in Henrik's name. Lalli murders Henrik and the servant follows his master's last instructions. As the ballad relates:

There the ox has taken a break,
On Nousiainen's sandy banks
On a tip of sandy marsh:
There Lord Henrik
Was first laid to rest
A church was constructed there as well
In Lord Henrik's name.

The servant misses the severed finger, however, which is recovered from an ice floe as in the Latin proper. The evil Lalli returns home with the bishop's mitre, and in the presence of his wife, undergoes the painful death recounted above. The ballad ends with the image of Bishop Henrik in joy, while the tortured Lalli skis in hell. Church paintings from the fifteenth century show details – such as depictions of Lalli's wife – reminiscent of the ballad account in particular and suggest that the ballad dates from the late medieval period, during which time the pilgrimage in memory of St Henrik was still performed twice annually. The existence of the ballad in a variety of different manuscripts, as well as numerous recountings of Henrik's miracles in oral tradition from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, attest also to the ongoing popularity of the saint.

As with the legend of St Sunniva, sources and parallels for the story of St Henrik can be found. The outline of the narrative matches in broad strokes that of Bishop Henrik of Sigtuna, who was killed while living in exile in Skåne in 1134 (Anttonen 1998, 2). The miracle of the finger, as well as an account of its having cured the blindness of its

discoverer (see Virtanen and DuBois 2000, 236–7), is told in Sweden of St Helena of Skövde, whose finger is recovered from a hedge rather than an ice floe (Jokipii 1989, 106). The motif of consigning one's remains to an ox cart and allowing the beast to decide the place of interment likewise has broad parallels in other saints' legends from various parts of Europe (Jokipii 1989, 109). The distinctive motif of the stolen mitre and its effects can in some ways be seen as a Christian response to the tradition of the torture of Christian clerics by eastern pagans. Adam of Bremen, for instance, quoted King Svein of Denmark as having accounted for the early-eleventh-century martyrdom of sixty priests at Oldenburg in this way:

After the skin of their heads had been cut with an iron in the form of a cross, the brain of each was laid bare. With hands tied behind their backs, the confessors of God were then dragged through one Slavic town after another, harried either with blows or in some other manner, until they died. (*Gesta Hammaburgensis* 2:xlirii, 84)

From this point of view, the divine retribution wreaked upon Lalli could be seen as a probable example of clerical poetic justice. Finally, as Martti Haavio points out, the ballad detail of Lalli's fury about bills unpaid may reflect folk resentment of a late medieval custom of mandatory free hospitality for Swedish officials travelling through the Finnish countryside (the so-called *ruokaruotsi* requirement; Haavio 1948, 220–1).

St Henrik's martyrdom became the focus of a well-developed pilgrimage tradition, one which followed his path from the site of a building in which he preached at Kokemäki, past Lalli's farm, the murder site at Lake Köyliö (marked by a chapel on an island there), on to his crypt at Nousiainen, and finally to his altar at the Cathedral of Turku, to which his relics were translated sometime around 1300. The pilgrimage and feast took place both on the anniversary of his martyrdom (20 January) and on 18 June, the date either of the discovery of his finger (Jokipii 1989, 98) and/or of the translation of his relics to Turku (Anttonen 1997, 5).

With these basic outlines in mind, then, it is possible to examine the development of both the legends and the cults of these two saints as reflections of trends in medieval Christianity, particularly as it becomes propagated in Scandinavia. We may observe in them a conceptual development from the earliest legend and cult that maps the periphery of the Christian world, to a well-developed pilgrimage site that becomes a centre for religious experience both for the laity

and for the bishops that locate their seats nearby. Finally, as Christianity becomes well ensconced in the society of Norway-Denmark and Finland-Sweden, the cults, along with the bishops' seats, become transferred to cities of state and mercantile significance, where the saint's relics become part of the apparatus of state legitimacy and power. In the case of Sunniva, the cult is soon outclassed in this function by the cult of King St Olaf, which rises soon after his death in 1030. In the case of Henrik, however, the saint remains a key symbol both of the distinct identity of Finland within the Swedish empire, and of the authority of the bishops of Turku. In the discussion below, this process of change is discussed in terms of five overlapping but basically consecutive stages.

Stage 1. The Religiosity of *Exilium: In deserto vivens*

In the context of early medieval Christianity, the notion of *exilium*, of a voluntary retirement from the tensions and temptations of the world into the contemplative security of the wilderness, was an ancient and well-entrenched strategy for attaining sanctity. In the early Christian tradition, figures like St John the Baptist, Christ himself, and the Egyptian Mary contributed to the development of contemplative retreats into the desert as a means of gaining spiritual enlightenment and divine consolation. In fourth-century Egypt, St Anthony (251–356) is credited with establishing the eremitical life and founding the first monastery, in 305 (Delaney 1980, 65). The fifth-century St Honoratus brought this hermit-monk tradition to Gaul, establishing a hermit's cell and eventually a monastery on one of the islands of Lérins, near Antibes c. 400 (Delaney 1980, 289). De Paor and de Paor (1960, 49) note that St Patrick may have lived for a time at Lérins; in any case, it is clear that this Egyptian tradition eventually diffused from Gaul into the British Isles during the fifth century. In Ireland, as in Egypt a century earlier, this eremiticism gave rise to conflicting phenomena: on the one hand, holy men and women ventured forth to remote places in search of contemplative seclusion while, on the other hand, their devoted followers tracked them down to create colonies of cells or huts in the shadow of their holiness. The world's peripheries became a site of both Christian exile and Christian friendship, a place to both lose human connections and gain human fellowship of a superior kind.

This early Christian tradition almost certainly lies at the root of the cult of St Sunniva, if not also St Henrik. British Isles eremiticism spread holy hermits and anchorites throughout the coastal islands of northwestern Europe, from Ireland, England, and Scotland to Iceland. In his archaeological overview of the island of Selja, Alf Tore Hommedal (1996) points to intermittent human use of Sunniva's cave already in the third century, and notes the eventual strong Celtic influence in western Norway during the eighth century. The occasional arrival of Celtic hermits and the back-and-forth commerce of Norwegian settlers between the British Isles and western Norway, Hommedal posits, could well explain the development of an oral tradition regarding a colony of holy hermits on Selja during the centuries immediately prior to large-scale Norwegian conversion (119). We may note in passing that the direction of holy hermits and of monastic communities was not uniformly west to east: by the tenth century, there was said to be a colony of Scandinavian nuns in northern Scotland, with a Norwegian queen among their number (DuBois 1999, 82). This understanding of the origin of the cult of Sunniva and her companions on Selja accords well with details of the legend as it eventually emerges.

While medieval hagiographers sought to depict Henrik as a bishop, and one intimately (and fatally) involved in tending to the spiritual life of his flock, their accounts also betray a view of him as a holy hermit, one seeking *fuga mundi* (a flight from the world) in the pagan wilderness of Finland. Henrik does not remain in Finland to enjoy the fruits of a fully Christianized realm. Rather, he sacrifices the comforts and security of his see at Uppsala for a life of privation among what would have been a tiny population of converts. The process of Christianization progressed slowly in Finland, and even in the thirteenth century, Swedish authorities were applying to Rome for permission to subdue resistant Finns by force. Thus, in a very concrete sense, Henrik, too, is opting for a life of *exilium*, albeit one still engaged in contact with other people. In this way, he resembles other men of stature in the church who renounced their authority for the missionary's life: Olaf's Bishop Sigurð for one (a former bishop of York), and St David of Sweden (a former Cluniac abbot). They, like Henrik and like Sunniva, chose to lead a small community of Christians on the periphery rather than enjoy the ease of life in the centre of Christian society.

Stage 2. Domestication of *Exilium*: Pilgrimage to the Proximate Remote and the Cult of Martyrs

In the first stage, then, the holy person becomes distinguished in life through a particularly fervent commitment to God. This life of *witness* – the original meaning of *martyr* – could attract the admiration of others, even when (or perhaps *especially* when) lived out in the wilderness, alongside a populace with little knowledge of Christianity. And when that sense of witness, that martyrdom, was strong enough to lead the individual into a complete sacrifice of life, the natural sense of wonder was bound to increase. The memory of the saint's acts, like the light shining upon Sunniva's cave, had the power to attract travellers to its side. And these travellers were pilgrims.

To move to the second stage in the development of a cult, then, the participation of the living community was essential. Regardless of whether we examine the comparatively spontaneous development of cults during the early medieval period, or the more protracted, careful canonization process that began to be instituted in the late tenth century, the testimony and acclaim of the lay community was an absolute necessity. The will and witness of the people, the *vox populi* (voice of the people) was demonstrated first and foremost by the act of pilgrimage, and reinforced by the report of miracles obtained.

Our perceptions of popular piety in the medieval period are often filled with snide portrayals of credulous peasants thronging around the grave of some ordinary person, misinterpreting ordinary occurrences as miracles and signs. And, indeed, contemporary writers of the Middle Ages sometimes shared this dim view of popular devotion to new saints. Guibert of Nogent condemns with ire the eleventh-century cult of a man whose chief claim to sanctity appears to have been that he died on a Good Friday (Sumption 1975, 146). And the Norman Abbot Paul declared that many of the purported saints venerated at St Albans by his Anglo-Saxon predecessors were, as far as he could tell, 'boors and half-wits' (147). Yet the outpouring of sincere human emotion is a remarkable and mesmerizing event to witness, one that can draw people into it and lead them to engage in similar acts of emotional release. This visceral efficacy is what pervaded the visit to a saint's humble cell or place of death in the early days of a cult, and what made pilgrimage in its initial phases such a deeply moving and transformative experience.

Whatever sense of the mystical attracted the first pilgrims to a site, the occurrence of miracles there soon became the source of attraction for most subsequent pilgrims. Pilgrims came with petitions, hoping for miraculous cures or favours. Pope St Gregory taught that God permitted miracles in order to help win over human adherents. From this perspective, Gregory argued, more miracles could be expected at

the periphery of the Christian world than at its thoroughly Christianized and secure centre (DuBois 1999, 64). William of Canterbury, in accounting for the spate of miracles attributed to the new St Thomas à Becket in the late twelfth century, asserted that God permits new saints particular potency as intercessors so that their cults may become established. Once they become known as saints, however, they withdraw, allowing new saints elsewhere a turn in the celestial spotlight (Sumption 1975, 62). From this point of view, the novelty of a cult was an important source of its appeal, as eager pilgrims strove to become one of those lucky first recipients of miracles that would help establish and propagate the cult itself. Already in the policies of St Augustine (354–430), it became practice to record testimonials of miracles for the edification of subsequent pilgrims, and these written documents – *libelli miraculorum* – became not only excellent advertisements for a particular pilgrimage site or saint but also the eventual basis of formal canonization proceedings as well. These testimonials are evident in the Latin accounts of both St Sunniva and St Henrik and become part of the vernacular understandings of the saint, as illustrated in both Old Norse accounts of St Sunniva and in the Finnish ballad of St Henrik.

It should also be noted in regard to the cults of Sunniva and Henrik that their places of martyrdom bore a special relation to the places where the Christian community came to live. Although the holy hermit chose a place at the outskirts of the Christian world – often a place as remote and untrammelled as humanly possible to reach – with time, Christian settlements caught up and surpassed these former frontiers. In the pilgrimage, the seeking Christian elected to leave the ordinary world, both spatially and temporally, in order to visit for a time the geographic site and implicit lifestyle of the saintly deceased. Yet this former frontier, this former place of *exilium* was now comparatively convenient, a proximate remote which had become, in fact, (through the development of the cult) a spiritually charged centre rather than a periphery. This unique constellation of features – its nearness and remoteness, peripherality and centrality – made the site of pilgrimage a place of transcendence and power, a place which mediated differences in the way in which Camille (1992) notes for medieval Christian art and civilization in general.

Stage 3. Institutionalization of the Sacred: Martyr Sites and the Role of Bishops

The acclaim of lay faithful was not all that was needed for the establishment of a cult. Needed as well was the endorsement and the encouragement of a local bishop. Jokipii has pointed out the clear logic of sending bishops to do missionary work in Scandinavia: a bishop could not only baptize but also confirm the faithful, and a bishop had the authority to establish and consecrate churches (1989, 73). The right to recognize or advance a saint's cult was a further duty of the episcopate, one that remained uniquely its own until the late tenth century, when the process began to include the participation of Rome. The establishment of saints' cults should be seen in this wider context of authority, in which the bishop truly represented the voice of the established church, bringing the newly flowering faith of the North into alignment with the practices and norms of the universal church, and doing so in a way that was recognized as equal to anything occurring in Rome, Tours, or Canterbury. The bishop and the local saint's cult were together a sign to the faithful of the equal status of their community within the wider community of saints.

The act of recognizing a saint's cult was most often effected by the ritual known as *elevatio*, or the elevation of the saint's relics onto an altar for public viewing. The elevation – which could be performed periodically, for instance, on the anniversary of the saint's death – became closely associated with the popular act of pilgrimage and the petition for miracles. Once a saint attained a following of sufficient numbers, however, it was common to place the saint's relics in an ornamented shrine, or reliquary, to be stored in an altar of its own within the church or cathedral. The altar also became the repository of gifts given in thanksgiving for the saint's help. Gold, jewels, and textiles were important gifts for such altars, but small replicas of the kind of help given were also common (Sumption 1975, 65). The lavishness of the resulting altar helped underscore the importance of the saint both for the local diocese and in the eyes of pilgrims.

The accounts left to us of the establishment of the cults of Sunniva and Henrik follow this pattern well. In the account of St Sunniva, bishop Sigurð plays an active role, examining the initial relics brought to the king, urging King Olaf to go and investigate reports of miracles on the island of Selja, and consecrating the church that Olaf subsequently erects there. In doing so, Sigurð was almost certainly replicating the kind of cult common in the British Isles, where clergy and faithful alike seem to have shared in a particular eagerness to elevate and enshrine relics of noteworthy local individuals, much to the consternation, as we have noted, of incoming Norman clerics. Indeed, the continued arrival of at least some of the later English missionaries in Scandinavia, as well as the migration of monasteries such as the Benedictine house at Selja, may owe something to the

internal changes effected in the English church after the Norman Conquest. Bringing their pre-Conquest religiosity with them to Scandinavia, these cleric-missionaries were quite likely to encourage and ratify the development of local saints' cults. Sigurð's participation in the cult of Sunniva is stressed in the Latin and Old Norse accounts, for it demonstrated the validity of Sunniva's cult, especially in the era before the process of canonization became widely known or instituted. Sigurð's authority was all that was necessary for the establishment of an 'official' cult of St Sunniva.

For Henrik, the association with the episcopate was even closer. Henrik himself was a bishop, and his dying words about building a church could be seen as the direct establishment of his own cult. Notwithstanding, it was necessary for later bishops to recognize and promote this foundation. It is likely that the popular cult moved into the stage of episcopal endorsement during the career of Bishop Thomas, who presided over the see of Turku from c. 1225 to 1245. Thomas, like Henrik, was English; he was also an active participant in royal affairs and crusades against pagan rebels, details which may have led him to identify particularly with his predecessor (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1984, 30–1). By promoting Henrik's cult, Thomas clearly established the antiquity of his seat, which he had inherited from a somewhat nebulous Bishop Folquinus and his predecessor Bishop Rudolphus, whose terms as bishop remained obscure. With Henrik, then, the episcopate had a clear and impressive beginning.

Peter Brown (1981) has pointed out that the authority of the episcopate became associated early on with the cult of local saints:

The bishops of western Europe came to orchestrate the cult of the saints in such a way as to base their power within the old Roman cities on these new 'towns outside of town.' The bishop's residence and his main basilica still lay within the city walls. Yet it was through a studiously articulated relationship with great shrines that lay at some distance from the city – St. Peter's, on the Vatican Hill outside Rome, Saint Martin's, a little beyond the walls of Tours – that the bishops of the former cities of the Roman Empire rose to prominence in early medieval Europe. (8)

Ó Carrigáin (1994, 1) sites early records that show that by the seventh century, pilgrim hostels were clustered up to the very walls of St Peter's, and that Pope Sergius was obliged to repair pilgrim dwellings that had been damaged by tiles falling from the roof of the cathedral. In the case of Scandinavia, it appears that the location of the saint's shrine in fact dictated the initial location of bishops' seats. Such is clearly the case with Sunniva, whose island of Selja became the seat of

the new diocese. It is also the case with Henrik, whose relics caused Nousiainen to become the seat of the bishop of Finland. In this way, the Scandinavian bishops followed the pattern set by continental bishops centuries earlier. Yet in the balance of power between saint and bishop, the saint clearly held the advantage, helping bolster the bishop, who relied on the saint for legitimacy and some degree of notoriety both in local and international contexts.

We can also note, however, that the establishment of a cult could also be seen as an act of pastoral care on the part of the bishop. Pilgrimage to foreign shrines was an arduous, expensive, and dangerous undertaking, and thus, not one that was open to many of the faithful. Erecting crosses as substitute pilgrimage sites was one method by which bishops and abbots in Ireland tried to keep their flocks nearby (Ó Carrigáin 1994, 36–7). The bringing back of relics, or of objects that had belonged to or been touched by a saint (*benedictiones*), were further means of affording the local populace the benefits of pilgrimage without the particular dangers and expense it represented for North Europeans. Through the cult of the local saint, on the other hand – in keeping with the teachings of Pope St Gregory – each diocese could experience not only these imported founts of sacred power but also its own wonder-age of miracles, recalling, through the saint's cult, the unique ways in which God touched the local community. And the bishop, in promoting the cult, was thus acting within the framework of his pastoral duties.

The episcopal control of saints' cults can help explain the somewhat puzzling fact that Finland never produced any other saint besides Henrik. In the rest of Scandinavia, a multitude of local saints were known, usually one or two per diocese. The dearth of saints on the Finnish side can appear surprising indeed in contrast. Such a multiplicity of saints correlated with a multiplicity of dioceses, and since Finland possessed only one bishop or see, the need or likelihood of multiple saints was greatly reduced. Indeed, the only other near-saint who arose in Finland was likewise a bishop of Turku, the Swedish-born Hemming, who presided from 1338 to 1366. Towards the very end of the Catholic period, Bishop Hemming's cause was advanced in Rome, and his relics were solemnly elevated at the cathedral of Turku in 1514 (*Catalogus et ordinaria successio* 1988, 43). Here again, his persona would have helped underscore the power and centrality of the see of Turku as the undisputed centre of Finnish society. It is telling that when the rising Lutheran reformer Mikael Agricola began to be perceived as a threat to the dominance of the Swedish crown in Finland, the king chose to leave the seat of bishop vacant for five years and then divided the diocese into two, creating

the new diocese of Viipuri in 1554 (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1984, 63). Gustav Vasa's acts attest to the significance of the bishop of Turku as a leader of society in Finland.

Stage 4. Centralization of the Institutions: Translation of Relics and Episcopal Seats to Centres of Secular Commerce and Administration

The resting places of both St Sunniva and St Henrik were moved during the Middle Ages, in a formal process known as *translatio*, translation. St Sunniva's relics were translated in 1170 under the authority of Bishop Pål of Bergen (1161–94), who was cited as doing such in the Latin proper for her feast. St Henrik's relics were translated in 1300 by Bishop Magnus (or Mauno) (1291–1308), the first native-born Finnish bishop of Turku. These events in general help underscore the close relation between bishops and saints, but they also help map the changing geography of secular and commercial power in the medieval North. The seats of bishops, the location of shrines, and the location of secular power all become co-terminal in the process of centralization. Significantly, in so doing, the saint and cult are decisively moved from the periphery or near-remote of the Christian world to the very heart of the contemporary Christian society. No longer a competing centre, the saint's altar and shrine becomes a tool for underscoring and maintaining the centre of states and societies.

The movement of bishop's sees occurred with some frequency in medieval Scandinavia. The earliest seats, as we have argued, tended to be close to the relics of a legitimizing saint, such as St Sunniva at Selja, St Eskil at Eskilstuna, or St Henrik at Nousiainen. With time, however, the growing power of the bishop and of the church drew leaders to relocate in cities that were seats of secular power. The see of Dalby moved to Lund in 1066, while the see of Eskilstuna was absorbed into that of Strängnäs sometime before 1164. The most prominent see of Sweden migrated repeatedly as the essay on St Eric below chronicles. In the case of Sunniva and Henrik, the see of Selja was transferred to the market city of Bergen in 1170, while Henrik's see moved from Nousiainen to Koroinen to Röntämäki (1276) and eventually to Turku (1300).

As the bishop moved, so it became natural in this light for the saint to move as well, although this fact signals graphically a shift in the

relative power of bishop and saint. Johnsen suggests (1968, 25–6) that earlier bishops before Pál (1161–94) had already begun to live at least part-time in Bergen, a shift towards the cities that he dates to the eleventh century and finds paralleled in Oslo and Stavanger as well. Yet in order to make the movement of the see viable, the saint as well seems to have needed to move, most likely when a suitable cathedral had been erected in the city. In St Sunniva's case, this seems to be the background for her translation in 1170.

The saints became part of the apparatus of power in their new homes. When King Hákon visited the city of Bergen, for instance, saga accounts state that the shrines of St Sunniva and many other saints were brought out of their churches to attend his speech alongside living members of the city (*Flateyjarbók*, 3:354). The centralization of the cult often endangered the relics of the saint, however. Soon after her arrival in Bergen, St Sunniva's relics had to be rescued from a city fire. An account in *Sverris saga* states that when her shrine was brought out of the threatened church, the flames retreated before it, so that the church and neighbourhood were spared (*Flateyjarbók*, 3:294). This miracle helped assure the local populace that St Sunniva was content with her new location and ready to aid local residents in the way that she had assisted pilgrims in Selja. Soon after St Henrik's arrival in Turku, the cathedral was burned by invading troops from Novgorod (1318; Jokipii 1989, 113). Henrik's relics were saved, however, and remained in the new cathedral to the time of the Reformation, when all the saints' relics were pooled into the sarcophagus of Bishop Hemming (Jokipii 1989, 115).

It should be noted, however, that the centralization of the saint's relics and cults did not always destroy veneration and pilgrimage at the earlier sites. Pilgrimage remained common in the sites of martyrdom of St Eskil, St Botvid, and St Staffan, even after their relics had been translated (Jokipii 1989, 104). In the case of Sts Sunniva and Henrik, the old sites likewise remained viable, reflecting, perhaps, the ongoing popular devotion to the saints in addition to (or even in competition with) that of the centralized, translated cult. The church at Selja continued to receive pilgrims, perhaps in part through the continued activities of the Benedictine monks on the island, who encouraged pilgrimage to both Selja's cave and their own relic of St Alban. In Finland, the nearness of Nousiainen and Turku somewhat mitigated the potential for competition between the sites, as pilgrims could follow a pilgrim trail from the earlier to the present site of the saint's relics. Records from as late as the eighteenth century, however, mention bringing the relics of Henrik back to Köyliö on a periodic

basis, probably in connection with one of his feasts, a tradition that attests to the continued importance of earlier sites in the saint's cult even after the Reformation (Jokipii 1989, 114).

Stage 5. 'Nationalization' of the Cult: Expansion of the Cult to Serve as a Trope of Monarchical Power and/or Nation

Dioceses were seats of power for bishops, but they were also sectors or subsections of national realms. In this sense, the cult of a saint could become part of a wider national identity for a people or kingdom. For St Sunniva, this did not occur, but St Henrik enjoyed the status of national saint, even after the Reformation. The divergent experiences of these two cults reflects the differing ways in which the saints were viewed within the political and cultural spheres of Norway and Sweden-Finland.

Although Sunniva was widely venerated in Scandinavia, her cult evidently lost the competition for the status of national cult to that of King St Olaf. Old Norse sources quote a number of moments in which Sunniva and Olaf are mentioned together as the patron saints of Norway. In a speech made during his rise to control over Norway, for instance, King Sverrir (a former priest) is said to have invoked 'God and his saints Olaf and Sunniva' (*Flateyjarbók*, 3:196). In their parley with King Hákon in *Hákonarsaga gamla*, the men of Gulathingslag bring Sunniva's shrine forth from its place in the church in Bergen in order to add the saint's weight and prestige to their royal address (*Flateyjarbók*, 3:354). And later in the same saga, Dagfinn makes a vow in the names of 'Christ, Mary, St Olaf, St Sunniva, and all other holy people of God' (*Flateyjarbók*, 3:365). On the whole, however, such moments show more local than national significance, and whenever both Olaf and Sunniva are mentioned together, Olaf's name always takes precedence. Olaf possessed superior characteristics for the making of a specifically national saint. His appeal to monarchical power-crafters was evident, and it is clear from the accounts of his early cult that his cause was particularly promoted by his son Magnus, who succeeded him as king of Norway. Significantly, however, Magnus also helped adorn the shrine of St Sunniva in Bergen, according to *Noregs kóngatal* (*Flateyjarbók*, 3:138). In this way, the cult of Sunniva was assimilated into the structures of legitimacy surrounding the Norwegian Crown.

In Finland, on the other hand, the national character of Henrik was evident from the very beginning. Although the proper for his feast makes mention of Eric and of Sweden, the references to Finns and Finland are far more common. Typical is the celebrant's exhortation:

Be glad all ye people,
And exalt the God of heaven,
Finland rejoices.

(*Breviarum Aboense*, 48)

Similarly, a Latin school hymn in honour of St Henrik, apparently composed in Finland and preserved in the 1582 work *Piae Cantiones Ecclesiasticae et Scholasticae Veterum Episcoporum* (Pious Church and School Songs of the Old Bishops) demonstrates the sustained national prominence of the saint, even after the Reformation:

A living branch of an olive tree
Is carried by a dove.
In pairs the various animals
Are enclosed in Noah's arc.

Therefore rejoice oh Finnish people
Over this gift,
That the Word of God
Has become universally known.

Henrik is depicted as the dove of good news who cheers Noah after the Flood (Gen. 8:11), the Finns as the waiting beasts longing for their freedom. That the Word has become universally known refers to its arrival even in the remote and formerly pagan Finland. The song, like the saint, appears particularly addressed to the Finnish people.

That Henrik was a particularly Finnish saint is evident from the lack of interest he enjoys in the rest of Scandinavia. His feast was included in the calendars of only the sees of Turku, Uppsala, and Skara (notes to *Breviarum Aboense*, 24). And while Finland contributed to the documented miracles of King St Olaf, St Nikolaus Hermansson, and St Birgitta, no miracle of St Henrik is attested outside of Finland (Jokipii 1989, 108). It is in this context highly significant that Magnus (Mauno), as Finland's first native bishop, should have been the one to translate his relics to Turku, thereby further underscoring the association of the saint with the ipso facto national see of Finland.

It is also likely, however, that the Finnish bishops used Henrik to underscore the ties of the Finnish diocese to Sweden. In the year 1209, the pope had temporarily awarded authority over the see of Finland to the Danish archdiocese of Lund, and the archdiocese of Uppsala had regained control only after some feverish negotiations with Rome. In

the 1230s, Bishop Thomas had invited the Teutonic Knights from south of the Gulf of Finland north to help him subdue rebels in Häme, a move which would have brought Finland under the sway of German archdioceses (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1984, 30). Yet, fortunately for Finland, the Knights did not take up the invitation, and Finland was spared the enfeudalization imposed upon the peoples of Livonia. By the end of the thirteenth century, Swedish control of Finland had solidified, with regular taxation and church dues required of Finns and military troops and fortifications stationed in the area. Finnish peasants were further required to provide hospitality for Swedish officials who passed through on business (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1984, 35). By celebrating St Henrik, the bishops were able to assert the longstanding control of Sweden over the diocese and marginalize competing claims in earlier state and church history. Henrik's 'national' status is thus a qualified one, underscoring the unique aspects of Finland within the overarching power structure of Sweden.

In opposition to these nationalizing trends, however, attempts were made to integrate all the northern saints into a unified, pan-Scandinavian canon, one which would focus on the 'Saints of the North' as reflections of the emerging pan-Scandinavian identity that culminated in the Kalmar Union (1397–1523). This trend was promoted particularly by international orders such as the Birgittines and the Dominicans. Finland's first Dominican priory was founded in Turku in 1249, named for the Norwegian King St Olaf (Jutikkala and Pirinen 1984, 31). The bishops of Turku soon gravitated towards the Dominican calendar and rite as a means of unifying the far-flung diocese, and under Bishop Benedictus (1321–38) this trend culminated with the formal adoption of the Dominican liturgy as the basis for all secular parishes in the diocese of Turku (notes to *Breviarum aboense*, 12). This fact led to some stress on integrating and unifying Finnish calendars, both among themselves and within the broader Dominican context. The *Breviarum aboense* thus contains propers for all the major Nordic saints, including St Sunniva. King St Olaf is omitted, but probably in error, or because his proper was contained in a different manuscript (notes to *Breviarum aboense*, 19n). In addition, by the fifteenth century, those saints with links to Sweden were to be commemorated jointly in a feast of the Patrons of Sweden (July 3–9). Their veneration also became concentrated into a single altar of northern saints in the cathedral of Turku, although the older altars to Henrik and others remained as well (Jokipii 1989, 112–14).

Sunniva's cult was relatively well known throughout Scandinavia, with depictions of Sunniva, along with King St Olaf, St Hallvarð, and even St Magnus of Orkney appearing with some frequency in Swedish churches, especially ones decorated during the later medieval period

(Lundén 1983). Sunniva was even known to some extent outside of Scandinavia proper, with her feast celebrated in Lübeck as well as in Cologne into the sixteenth century (notes to *Acta Sanctorum in Selio*, xxxi). Even in Iceland, however, her cult seems to have been advanced largely by bishops with connections to Bergen. For instance, a half-church was consecrated with her as co-patron in Engey in 1379. The officiating bishop, Albanus, was himself from Bergen (Cormack 1994, 154). After the Reformation, however, such pan-Scandinavian notoriety was not sufficient to ensure the continued prominence of a saint. In Lutheran Scandinavia, only clearly 'national' saints continued to enjoy some degree of their former veneration. The specific, highly nationalized understandings of saints like Olaf and Henrik can be seen as an attenuated reflection of this final stage in the development of their cults, but as such, they obscure earlier meanings of the cults held in earlier eras.

We may observe, then, a shift in the symbolism and workings of Christianity in Scandinavia from the time of first conversions through the later Middle Ages. In the early days of Nordic Christianization, the notion of *exilium* remained a prime means and marker of earthly sanctity. Devoted followers of Christ gave up the comforts of life so as to begin a *vita angelica* (angelic life) here on earth. St Sunniva flees riches and marriage for an anchorite's cell, and her death is only obliquely related to her Christianity. Her burial in the landslide signals God's attention to her plight during her existence in the wilderness. St Henrik's martyrdom reflects a somewhat later and, by modern standards, a more recognizable instance of martyrdom, as he is murdered precisely for carrying out his duties as a confessor among the newly converted Finns. Yet his sanctity arises as much out of his life of *exilium* as out of his murder.

Crucial to both cults in subsequent stages are the development of pilgrimage sites and the endorsement of local bishops. In this stage, the peripheral nature of these sites is still crucial, because they allow the faithful to experience a physical movement away from society as a means of modelling and achieving a spiritual flight from the temptations of the world. The cult then becomes a tool for the establishment and enhancement of episcopal authority, as bishops first promote the cults, then locate their seats near their shrines, and finally move their seats and the saint's relics to locations of central state and mercantile authority. This process of centralization, mirroring the growing centrality of church authority in Scandinavian states, transforms the peripheral saint and cult into at first a competing centre (potentially at odds with the secular world) and

then a subordinated prop, a holy image meant to buttress the already well-established authority of the bishop and state. Where the earliest bishops seem to have relied on the saints as keys to their legitimacy, by the time of their translations, the cults of Sunniva and Henrik appear largely reliant on the bishops for maintenance and possible revival.

In the final stages of their history, the cults become available as possible symbols of national identity. In the case of Norway, however, Sunniva's cult is soon overshadowed by that of King St Olaf (d. 1030), whose shrine comes to represent the highest pretensions of the emerging Norwegian state. While King Sigurð the Crusader still undertakes pilgrimage to the Holy Land and establishes his shrine for the relic of the Holy Cross at a peripheral site within Norway (DuBois 1999, 168–71), the Olaf cult seizes for itself the central position as a symbol of the mission of the church within the Norwegian state. Sunniva is absorbed quietly into this larger complex as a further instance of royal authority, both in the original erection of her church at Selja and at the continued adornment of her shrine at Bergen by Magnus.

In contrast, the rise of King St Eric IX as Sweden's martyr saint does not spell the end of the importance of Nousiainen or the cult of St Henrik in Finland. Nousiainen, and eventually Turku, remain important to Finns up to and after the time of the Reformation not because they continue to represent a Swedish periphery, but because they become recognized as the Finnish centre, rising as the seat of the see of Finland and thus the administrative centre of Finland as a distinct part of the Swedish empire. While Swedes increasingly turned their attention to their central king-saint's shrine at Stockholm, the Finnish church arrives at the next-best alternative to having its own national king-saint, venerating a saint who could be equated with the seat he predated and with the succession of church leaders in Finland ever since. His death on the Finnish side of the Bay of Bothnia, as well as the miracles attributed to him in Finland, allowed Finns to enjoy some degree of centralization in their expression of the faith, even while remaining an administrative colony of the mother country. In this light, the particular attention devoted to St Henrik's murderer Lalli in folk legends and songs acquires particular significance, especially when contrasted with the anonymous would-be murderers of St Sunniva.

We have seen, then, that saints' cults, as well as the legends that ground them, should not be regarded in static terms. They grew up in particular religious contexts, both locally and within wider Christian understandings of sanctity and its effects. They changed along with

the changing fortunes of the church in Scandinavia and help map in retrospect the stabilization, centralization, and eventual cooption of power that the church experienced in Scandinavian societies. That the cults survive to any degree today reflects most probably the national appeal of the final stage of their development, but it may also reflect something transcendent in these cults: a sense of holiness of certain persons and places and the willingness of human beings to contemplate the divine.

The Manuscript and the Translation

The following account is drawn from the Latin text *Acta Sanctorum in Selio* (Icelandic MS AM67Oqv), dated to the late twelfth century, some two centuries after the events described. It was edited by Gustav Storm (1880). The Latin text predates and probably served as a source for later versions written in Old Norse.

Acts of the Saints on Selja

I. In the days of the great emperor Otto I [936–73], there lived in Ireland a most blessed princess Sunniva, daughter of a king. After her father's death, she inherited the rule of the kingdom. Her good father had brought her up in the Christian faith, and she instructed her people to vigilantly refrain from evil. And through her pious life and good manner she invited them to acts of holiness. She held the sacrifice of the Mass of the holy Catholic Church in the highest esteem and looked with compassion upon the oppressed and the poor. In her early years, while under her father's direction, she showed great devotion to Christ. And thus, in her adult life, too, she displayed many holy examples and good works. For she held it right that those who have received honours above others should exercise virtue and perform acts of mercy so as to shine as a light for those who follow them.

II. Repute of her sanctity and noble birth spread far and wide and came at length to the notice of a tyrant. Instigated by the devil, he invaded the land of the virgin, violently plundering and nefariously devastating it. Then he approached Sunniva with all sorts of promises,

speaking to her in beautiful and persuasive words. Because of his strength and power, it hardly seemed possible for her to avoid his marriage bed. And he threatened that unless she agreed to his proposal, he would lay waste her entire kingdom as well as its inhabitants. But Sunniva burned with love of God. Thus she remained unpersuaded by his blandishments and his threats. She considered exile and the loss of lands and wealth superior to marriage with a sacrilegious man.

III. Sunniva held counsel with her court and asked them to choose between two options. They could give up their homeland in order to serve with fidelity the Holy Faith, or they could remain in danger under the rule of the evil tyrant. And through the gift of God's grace, many chose to place their trust in the servant of God, their queen Sunniva, by imitating her acts of piety and following her into exile. Thus, together with many men, women, and children who formed her company, Sunniva set forth in three ships headed north, to weather the storms and ravages of the sea. Committing themselves to the will of God, they set off with neither oars nor sails into the sea and into exile. But God the most high ensured the obedience of the winds and seas, saving those who had placed their trust in him, so that they passed unhurt and unharmed.

IV. After a long journey across the sea, they arrived in Norway, in the district known in the vernacular as Firdafylke. The people in that district were unacquainted with reason, wild in their manners and lacking in proper behaviour. And seeing the saints approaching their coast, they gathered an army and made ready to capture the intruders with clubs and swords. And when they could not capture them, they drove them away with arrows and stones. The people were blinded by paganism, and with their weak eyes they were unable to see the light of truth. The saints of God were thus obliged to turn again to the perilous sea. And although they would not separate from one another either in mind or in soul, nonetheless they were separated from each other bodily when a storm blew up.

V. After the wind and waves had subsided, St Sunniva and most of her company came to land at an island called Selja. And out of fear of the people of the country, they settled down to live in caves and caverns there. The rest of the company came to another island, which is called Kinn in the vernacular. And they lived there in a similar fashion and provided the necessities of life by fishing.

At this time, Jarl Hákon of Lade ruled: the cruelest of tyrants, he had seized violently the sceptre of the kingdom of Norway.⁴ While he ruled, the saints of God lived in great privation and poverty, in chastity and in holy life. The inhabitants of the land no longer lived on these islands, but those who lived nearby used to pasture their sheep there. And it happened, as it often does, when folk pasture their livestock in the mountains, on islands, or in the wilderness, that at summer's end the owners could not account for all their flocks. And the pagans who came from the mainland believed that the animals they could not find had been stolen. They looked upon the saints of God, who had come to the islands from afar, whose appearance was strange to them, their language incomprehensible, and their religion foreign. And without grounds, they believed that these people had taken their livestock.

Now one should not presume that the saints of God, who had forfeited their own property and homeland to live in virtue and dissociated themselves from lawless acts should take another's property in their exile. But the inhabitants were pagans, servants of the devil and unacquainted with God. And they looked down at the servants of God and condemned them as thieves and brigands and did them great injustice. Some journeyed also to the aforementioned jarl and bade him come with an army and murder the servants of God.

VI. And the evil jarl, child of sin and lamb of the devil, slow to do good but swift in doing evil, heard their sinful petitions and hurried to the aforementioned island with an armed troop to drive away the saints of God if only he could find them. But when the holy companions saw this, they retreated into their caves and prayed with tearful fervour to God. They asked him to grant their souls eternal life, and with the help of angels grant their bodies a grave beneath falling boulders. And so it came to pass, for great stones fell down and killed them all, denying their pursuers' fury while bringing their souls to heaven. Thus, the princess and her followers, her companions in adversity, came to share in great joy. From the caves of stone they came to the palace of the Almighty King, where they could behold God face to face, savouring his sweetness without interruption.

And when the aforementioned tyrant and his company of pagans had carefully searched the island without finding any of the saints of God, they were seized with amazement and left in great wonder.

VII. Some time later, the aforementioned jarl met a shameful death at the hands of his slave. And thus, he was turned over by the highest judgment seat to his deserved punishment. Then the renowned

Christian Olaf Tryggvason took over the kingdom of Norway. And through his diligence and actions, together with the exertions of the holy and worthy Bishop Sigurð, the people of Norway put aside their idolatry and received the sacraments of the Christian faith.

And at that time, it happened that some merchants were sailing by the island of Selja. And they saw on the shore a light shining as if up into the heavens. And they were greatly amazed and full of wonder at this new and unusual sight. When they neared the ray of light, they found a shining human head beneath it and they smelled a wonderful fragrance emanating from it.

VIII. Full of fear and awe, the merchants took with them the matchless treasure, the holy head, which surpassed in value all their wares. They sailed away to Trøndelag, where they met with the renowned king. These merchants were pagans, but after the famed king preached to them for the first time, they turned from their error and promised willingly to follow the commandments of God's word. The most Christian king summoned his worthy bishop and had them baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and received into the company of the faithful.

After their baptism and instruction in the faith of Christ, they told the pious king and worthy bishop about the beam of light which they had seen and the head that they had found. At the king's bidding they produced the head, which the worthy bishop took in his holy hands and enshrined reverently among other holy relics.

IX. There came thereafter many other witnesses of Christ's martyrs, and these who before had been the company's most ardent foes now addressed their prayers to them. For now many came to the king from that island and confirmed that they had also seen what the first merchants had seen. At the holy bishop's urging, the pious king took ship with a great troop of the faithful and approached the aforementioned island. And when he searched it, he found on its western side a rather high mountain, where it was plain that a landslide had occurred some years before. When the pious king and his bishop examined this place, they found among the stones fragrant bones. At the worthy bishop's behest, and with the king's assent, they built and consecrated a church, where God had worked miracles and wonders on account of his holy servants. And when the Christians gathered up the bones they could find with care, they found also the unharmed body of the holy virgin and martyr Sunniva. It was enshrined with great ceremony in the year of our Lord 969.

Much later, Bishop Pál of Bergen, he of blessed memory, had the holy Sunniva's relics translated from Selja to Bergen on 7 September of the year 1170 and enshrined in the cathedral there for the honour of God.

A ballad concerning St Henrik, the first bishop of Turku, who was born in England

The following ballad survives in a late seventeenth-century manuscript (*Piispa Henrikin surmavirsi* 1967), probably copied from an older work now lost. It accords well with versions of the ballad collected orally during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Haavio (1948) suggests that the ballad may have been composed in connection with a liturgical drama, to be performed during the annual pilgrimage along Henrik's final route. It is included here to reflect the kinds of hagiographic materials common in Scandinavia even after the Reformation.

There once were two holy men
Two nobles of the people
Two highborn Christian knights.
One was raised in Sweden land,
The other on a foreign strand.
Soon the swaddled babies grew,
The striplings rose together.
The child from the foreign strand –
That was Lord Henrik.
And he who rose in Sweden –
That Was Eric the knight,
Sweden's famous king.

The Lord Henrik said
To Eric his brother:
'Let us leave for the land of Häme,
A land as yet un-Christian,
A place without priests,
To raise churches of stone
And have chapels constructed.'

Then Eric the knight
Spoke thus and said aloud:
'My brother, son of woman,
Many are those who there have gone,

Not many those who have returned,
And more who have refused.
But I will leave, I will not mind.
If I am killed,
The king of the land cut down,
Another will be left behind.'

Then Lord Henrik
Spoke thus and said aloud:
'My dear lad, my little one,
Coachman one span high,
Take my sleigh from the shed
And put the sleigh in order,
An embroidered piece behind.
Bind it to its runners,
Bind its oaken shafts,
Extend its sinewy reins,
Clasp the fittings of walrus bone,
The harness of beaver bone,
On each side of the gray one's neck.
Take a stallion from its barley,
A strong one from its grass,
A long-mane from its malts.
Place a yoke of elm,
On the good steed's neck.'

Then Lord Henrik
Rumblingly drove away:
A herd of deer he startled
To run along behind him.
He made a flock of singing ones
Fly above his head,
Refreshing his forehead.
A bear [skin] there was in irons,
A grouse of iron [bell] clucked,
In the paws of the iron bear.
He made a white rabbit jump
On the fabric of the sleigh quilt.

Said the lad, the little one,
The coachman one span high:
'Now I do grow hungry.'

Said Lord Henrik in reply:
'Soon we'll come to a house,

To Lalli's past the bay.
Take a crust from off the oven.
Take some beer from the cellar.
Leave a coin behind.
Take hay from the hayloft,
Oats from the oat bin.
Leave a coin behind.'

An evil woman, cursed one,
Gluttonous and sour,
Shrieked out from the oven side,
Hollered from the hearth:
'Wait till Lalli gets back home,
He'll soon shake up your bones,
He'll soon throttle your head,
Scattering your sinews!'

Then Lord Henrik
Hurried from the house.
When Lalli came back home,
The old nag told a lie:
'My son, my younger one,
Someone has just come,
A hungry Swede, a German to feed.
He took a cake from off the oven,
Took beer from the cellar.
He left but ashes behind.
He took hay from the hayloft,
Oats from the oat bin.
He left but ashes behind.'

Lalli snatched his hatchet up,
His long and hefty ax.
He pushed his left ski on the snow,
Like a shaving smoothly whittled.
He rammed his right ski onto the crust,
Like a winter rabbit.
Lalli skied off with dreadful speed,
His left ski gliding swiftly.
Sparks fired from the skis' tracks
And smoke came from his staff marks.

Then Lord Henrik
Spoke thus and said aloud:
'Here comes Lalli on his skis,

A long spear at his side.'

He felt his ruin coming,
His day of distress approaching,
And said: 'My lad, my little one,
Coachman one span high,
Just keep watch behind a rock,
There's no shelter from a rock,
Just keep watch behind an oak,
From the shadow of the horse.
Wherever my bones do fly,
My sinews scatter,
Gather them up in a cloth,
And bind them in blue threads.
Arrange them nicely,
Set them in the stallion's sleigh.
Wherever the stallion takes a break,
There replace him with an ox.
Wherever the ox takes a break,
Let a church be raised,
A chapel be constructed,
In the name of Lord Henrik.'

There the ox has taken a break,
On Nousiainen's sandy banks,
On a tip of sandy marsh:
There Lord Henrik
Was first laid to rest.
A church was constructed there as well
In Lord Henrik's name.

But the lad, the little one,
The coachman one span high,
Could not discover in the snow
The sainted man's thumb,
The finger of his great master,
With its ring of gold.
Until in the heart of summer,

When the spring was fine,
The ice had melted from the lake.
Then in the heart of summer,
Upon a little ice floe,
The wind drove on the waves
The finger of the sainted hero,

With its ring of gold,
To be seen by people
As a noble sign.

This the great Lord would not permit,
Nor allow would God:
That beneath the water should sink,
Or be lost to all
The holy man's thumb,
The finger of the great master,
And its ring of gold.

Lalli, worst of pagans,
Cruellest of all Jews,
Who had killed the sainted man,
Bishop Lord Henrik,
Took the high mitre
From off the sainted man's head
And placed it on his own,
Upon his evil skull,
And went with pride back home.

The woman, working at her spinning,
Spoke thus and said aloud:
'Where, Lalli, did you get that hat,
Wretched man, that fine mitre?'

Lalli lifted up his hat;
Lalli's hair stuck to the hat,
And all the scalp as well.
It tore loose from the bone,
All tore clean off his skull.
His snout now had no shelter,
His head was now bare.
As skinless as a cow's pate,
His forehead now was bare.

This the great Creator did,
God the powerful permitted,
Our Father, as a wonder,
As a noble sign.

Now the bishop is in joy,
Lalli in evil torture.
The bishop sings with the angels,

Performs a joyful hymn.
Lalli is skiing down in hell,
His left ski slides along,
Into the thick smoke of torture.
With his staff he strikes about:
Demons beset him cruelly.
In the swelter of hell
They assail his pitiful soul.

Guard us from that, steadfast God,
Prevent that, trustworthy Creator.
Bring us into the heavenly hall,
Into eternal joy.
Free us from this wretched world.
Amen.

NOTES

- 1 Storm (*Acta Sanctorum in Selio* xxxxi) points out that these names are actually derived from a different saga source (accounts of the death of Tryggvi Ólafsson).
- 2 The Latin does not say that she has made a vow of chastity, although she refuses to ‘viro sacrilego copulari’ (para. II) in which ‘sacrilegus’ could mean either ‘temple-robbing’ or ‘wicked.’ The temple would be her chastity, given up to Christ alone.
- 3 All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.
- 4 Jarl Hákon is a favourite villain in the Norwegian king sagas. He ruled from about 963 until being displaced and murdered at the ascent of King Olaf Tryggvason in 995. His reign was marked by a rejection of Christianity, which had already been established in the realm by previous kings.

PART II

Royal Saints

St Olaf and the Skalds

JOHN LINDOW

Five texts accompany this chapter. The first three, all from a saga about St Olaf, were written down about 750 years ago by someone in the Trøndelag district of Norway, that is, the area around Trondheim. When the anonymous scribe was writing those passages, more than two hundred years had passed since Olaf's death in 1030 at the Battle of Stiklastaðir, also in the Trøndelag district. This particular saga (which in this context we might define as 'vernacular biography') is one of several about St Olaf, whose internal relationships are still not fully understood and probably never will be (for a brief orientation see Heinrichs 1993). Gustav Storm edited eight manuscript fragments into a so-called *Oldest Saga of St Olaf* (*Óláfs saga hins Helga* 1893), an Icelandic work from the end of the twelfth century. However, Jonna Louis-Jensen (1970) separated two of these fragments from the rest and assigned one of them instead to an early Icelandic legendary of St Olaf, from 1155–65, and Jónas Kristjánsson (1976) has shown that *Oldest Saga* and *Legendary Saga of St Olaf*, the earliest complete saga and the one from which texts 1–3 below are taken, may in effect be no more than redactions of the same text, although *Legendary Saga* is the later redaction. Kristjánsson would put its composition at around 1225, while Heinrichs et al. (*Olafs saga hins Helga* 1982) argue for a date around 1200. Olaf's biography had already figured in some Norwegian historical works from the second half of the twelfth century, including the monk Theodoricus's *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* (see *Monumenta historica Norvegiæ* 1880 and *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* 1998), and two anonymous works, the vernacular *Ágrip af Noregs konunga sögum* (see Ágrip 1984 and 1995) and *Historia Norvegiae* (1880 and 2003). All three of these interrelated works are, in effect, synopses of Norwegian royal biography, although *Historia Norvegiae* in particular may be related to the cult of St Olaf (Ekrem 1998, 1999, 2000). Around 1220 or so Styrmir Kárason, an Icelandic priest, composed a saga of St Olaf, now known only fragmentarily from later sources, and not long thereafter, between c. 1225 and 1235, Snorri Sturluson, Iceland's most famous medieval author, composed a saga of St Olaf, the so-called *Separate Saga of St Olaf*, and he incorporated a version of it into his *Heimskringla*, a compilation of sagas about Norwegian kings. Lives of

St Olaf based on Snorri's *Separate Saga* but augmented from other sources are also to be found in many of the great manuscripts of late medieval Iceland.

Besides this secular saga tradition, there was an ecclesiastical tradition about St Olaf, focusing primarily on the miracles. Here too the textual relationships are complex (for the most recent summaries, see Ekrem 2000 and the introduction to *Passio*, 2001), but they may be summarized as follows. It is likely that written records of Olaf's miracles were kept in Niðaróss with his body and other relics. Theodoricus offers a somewhat restricted account of the translation and miracles of Olaf because, he says, they have already been recorded by several others. He may be referring here to a lost **Translatio Sancti Olavi* and perhaps to other works. A Latin legendary of Olaf is retained in two basic forms, conventionally referred to as the shorter and longer versions. The shorter version was edited on the basis of the manuscripts then known, with a manuscript from c. 1400 as the basis, by Gustav Storm (*Monumenta historica Norvegiæ* 1880, 125–44) under the title *Acta sancti Olavi regis et martyris*. One year later F. Metcalfe published an edition of a longer version unknown to Storm, namely Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 209, a late twelfth-century manuscript that had originally belonged to Fountains Abbey, the wealthy Cistercian monastery in Yorkshire. He called the text *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* (1881), and this is the sole representative of the longer version, although a manuscript fragment from Helsinki may represent this or an even longer version (Malin 1920). The shorter version is also available in vernacular form in the so-called Old Norwegian homily book, AM 619 4to, a manuscript from around 1200 or a little later (*Codex AM 619 4to* 1929).

In the places where they overlap, the two versions are quite close in wording. Both contain *vita* (or *passio*) and *miracula* sections and have the same twenty miracles in the *miracula* section. The longer version goes on to include forty-nine miracles in all. The order of the miracles in all manuscripts is consistent enough to suggest strongly that there was one original, a version of the shorter text, which was expanded at a later date (for a chart showing the arrangement of the miracles in various manuscripts see Ekrem 2000, 112–13).

The last miracles are prefaced by the following statement: 'An additional treatise by Bishop Eysteinn of Norway concerning the miracles of the blessed Olaf' (*Passio*, 2001, 61). The Eysteinn in question is Eysteinn Erlendsson, who was the second archbishop of Niðaróss, filling that office during 1161–88. Educated in Paris, he was a chaplain to King Ingi Krokrygg Haraldsson (1134/5–61) and promoted church reform during the reign of Magnús Erlingsson (on Eysteinn see Gunnes 1996). His role in the origin of the long version

would thus appear to be assured, and many observers have also connected him with the short version as well. Important contributions, such as those of Vemund Skard (1932), Anne Holtsmark (1956), Erik Gunnes (1973), and Inger Ekrem (2000) seek to determine whether the *Passio Olavi* is the work of a single author, presumably Eysteinn, whether he might also have composed the shorter version, which version might have been composed first, and what the circumstances of composition might have been. Even putting aside Ekrem's attractive hypothesis that the *Passio* represents a second part of *Historia Norvegiae* and that the composition had to do with the institution of the archdiocese of Niðaróss in 1152/53 (Ekrem 2000), Eysteinn's connection with the work puts it somewhere in the decades just after the middle of the twelfth century, in Niðaróss.

The oldest extant liturgical texts are English and strikingly early, from the mid-eleventh century, only a generation or so after Olaf's death. They build more on general martyrs' offices than on details of Olaf's passion and miracles, but such details will surely have been included as *lectiones* from the very beginning in the Norwegian liturgy, and the later attested *lectiones* are from the shorter version of the Niðaróss legendary, as are the Scandinavian breviaries (the clearest summary of the Olaf liturgical texts remains Gjerlow 1967).

Following the discussion of Munch and Unger in the introduction to their edition of Snorri's independent saga of St Olaf (*Óláfs saga hins Helga*, 1853), scholars now call our saga from Trøndelag the *Legendary Saga of St Olaf*, because it reads more like a *legenda* than do Snorri's versions; that is, it focuses on the miracles that gave rise to Olaf's cult. It is therefore all the more surprising to read the statement concerning Olaf, namely that judgments of Olaf's character and disposition varied. In a more or less parallel passage in his version of the saga of St Olaf, Snorri Sturluson has a physical description of Olaf. It is located early in his saga. It states that when he grew up, Olaf was short, stocky, and powerful, light-haired and red-faced, with sharp eyes that inspired fear in others when he was angry. Olaf was expert with a bow, good at crafts, brave, a good talker, and very competitive. Called Olaf the Stout, he first sailed on a warship at the age of twelve. Although this description gives no hint of the saint-to-be, it is neutral with respect to others' judgment of him. The statement in *Legendary Saga* encapsulates the dual nature of Olaf: like most of his contemporaries in Norway, he was born a pagan, and like most of his social equals he engaged in Viking activity, converted to Christianity while abroad, and fought for power and fame. Indeed, power and fame were the stakes at the Battle of Stiklastaðir, where Olaf was killed. As texts 2 and 3 below indicate, signs of Olaf's sanctity were seen almost immediately after the battle,

and many followed. Olaf in life therefore contrasted starkly with Olaf in death, and one suspects that Olaf in life might have been surprised at the power and fame he was to achieve after his death. Although he was never formally canonized, Olaf is arguably the most famous Scandinavian saint.

Olaf was not the king of Norway when the Battle of Stiklastaðir was fought. He ruled from 1015 onward, but in 1028 Knud the Great had landed in the Oslofjord – with a fleet said in some sources to number 1500 ships – and there he had himself declared king. Thereafter Knud travelled from district to district in Norway, having each one declare him king. Olaf's only recourse was to flee north, but there he found no support, so he crossed the mountains into Sweden, and continued east to Aldeigjuborg (Staraja Ladoga) and finally to Novgorod. Without a single battle having been fought, Knud was now king of all Norway. His North Sea imperium had reached its height, including as it did England, Denmark, and Norway. He appointed his jarl Hákon Eiríksson as his under-king in Norway, a position Olaf had been offered years earlier but had refused, leading to the enmity between him and Knud.

Two years later Olaf returned to Sweden, and, with troops provided him by the Swedish king Önundr-Jakob, crossed back into Norway near Niðaróss. At Stiklastaðir, just north of the town, he met what we might call the Norwegian army – his being the invading army – which was significantly larger than his. His feast day, the day of his death, was the date of the battle, 29 July 1030.

The sources agree that one or more miracles occurred on that date. One year and five nights later, on 3 August 1031, Bishop Grimkell, one of those English prelates Olaf is said to have brought to Norway, opened the grave. Olaf's body was incorrupt. His wounds had healed, his complexion was ruddy, and his hair and nails had continued to grow. The remains were translated to St Clement's Church in Niðaróss, and Grimkell declared Olaf's sanctity. As the miracles continued, a local cult grew up, which soon spread. At least forty-seven church dedications are known from Norway, and both Dominican and Franciscan houses were dedicated to him there. His cult was also popular in the other Scandinavian lands and rivalled or eclipsed national saints (e.g., for Iceland, see Cormack 1994). As is either ironic or perhaps fitting, given Olaf's close connection with Knud the Great, the cult was also popular in the British Isles (Dickens 1937–45). Forty church dedications are known there, not just in the old Scandinavian settlement areas of Orkney and Shetland and the areas of greatest Scandinavian influence, such as Yorkshire and East Anglia, but also in such cities as London, Chester, Exeter, Winchester, and of

course York. Clearly the cult moved in mercantile circles, which explains its appearance in northern Germany.

Olaf was hardly a martyr king like King Edmund of East Anglia, who was killed by Vikings, those quintessential pagans in the eyes of contemporary church writings. Although history credits him with eradicating the last traces of paganism in remote parts of Norway, his namesake, Olaf Tryggvason, was just as zealous in his conversion activities in Norway and also triggered through his actions the conversion of Iceland. And although he died in the Battle of Svöldr fighting a Danish fleet, Olaf Tryggvason's traditional enemies, the jarls of Hlaðir, the area around Niðaróss in the Trondheim fjord, really were pagans, or at least they are presented as virulent pagans in the later sagas. Olaf Haraldsson's greatest enemy, Knud, was a great promoter of the church, both in England and in his native Denmark, which had had a Christian king since 960 or so, two generations before Olaf Haraldsson was born. The leaders of the army opposing Olaf at Stiklastaðir included those who had previously been his supporters – that is, who had acceded to his sometimes violent actions undertaken to eradicate paganism.

Nor does it appear that Olaf led a particularly exemplary life or even did all that much for the church during his reign. A church law is credited to him, and many stone churches are said to date from his era, but Knud the Great, for example, did far more for the church than Olaf ever did.

How did it come about, then, that Olaf became the patron saint and *rex perpetuus* of Norway, the most widely celebrated and renowned saint of the North? The immediate answer is provided by the continuing miracles and the power and testimony of his incorrupt body. There were, of course, ample political reasons, touching affairs of both church and state, that made these miracles and the future saint they presaged highly convenient. The conversion of Scandinavia had originated on the continent, under the direction of the archdiocese at Hamburg-Bremen. Early missions are documented for both Denmark and Sweden, and as I have mentioned, Denmark was officially Christian well before the end of the tenth century. As episcopal sees were established in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, they were all subordinate to Hamburg-Bremen, and this cannot have been a convenient arrangement for Scandinavian kings and perhaps also not for the bishops, if they were appointed from local prominent families. The drive to break away from Hamburg-Bremen must have begun in the eleventh century, and it bore fruit in the twelfth century. Again Denmark was the leader, with Lund (since 1658 in Sweden, but then a part of Denmark) becoming the archdiocese for the North early in the twelfth century and Norway and Sweden achieving independent

archdioceses in the middle of that century.

Based on the religious vocabulary, it is apparent that England played a far greater role in the conversion of Norway than it did in Denmark and Sweden, and in this light one may surmise that the Englishman Grimkell might have taken national as well as personal pride in the possibility of a Norwegian saint. The greater nationalistic pride, however, would have been that of the Norwegians, and even those who had opposed Olaf in life can easily have supported him after his death. Many of these opponents were from Trøndelag. Although Olaf himself was from the Oslofjord area, his body, the locus of the cult, and the pilgrim site that grew up were all in Niðaróss, the centre of Trøndelag. Thus local pride may also have been kindled.

Nearly all observers point to the immediate political situation following Olaf's death. Knud appointed his young son Svend as dependent king of Norway, with the boy's English mother, Ælfgifu, as regent. Harvests were not good, some ill-chosen laws were promulgated, and the reign was unpopular. It is said that Ælfgifu denied the incorrupt nature of Olaf's corpse, but she was clearly in a minority. The combination of a dead king's miracles and the living ruler's unpopularity could easily have given an impetus to the growth of Olaf's cult. Less than five years after his death at Stiklastaðir, Olaf's foremost adversaries were among those who went to Russia to bring back Olaf's son Magnus and restore to him the crown of his father. Svend and Ælfgifu could mount little resistance and fled; shortly thereafter Knud died, and Magnus Ólafsson went on to earn the sobriquet 'the Good.'

Olaf had been a fairly traditional Norwegian king, in any number of ways, and as such, he kept a number of skalds at his court. Throughout the Viking age such poets were attached to various royal courts. Their duty was to record, in verse, the king's exploits. As we have them today, their verses about kings deal primarily with battles, although other topics are covered. Although obviously a skilled skald's duty was to present his king in the best possible light, since the Middle Ages people working with the tradition have stressed its truth value. The first to do so was Snorri Sturluson, who commented on the issue in the prologue to *Heimskringla*, the compilation of kings' sagas into which he embedded a version of his saga of Olaf the saint.

With King Harald [Fairhair] were skalds, and men still know their poems and the poems of all the kings who have been in Norway since then, and we took most examples [evidence] from what is said in those poems which were recited before the chieftains themselves or their sons. We take all that to be true,

which is to be found in these poems concerning their journeys and battles. And that is the custom of skalds to praise that one most, whom they are before at the moment, but no one would dare to tell to someone himself of his deeds, when all those who heard it would know that it was fiction and lies, and indeed he himself. That would then be mockery, and not praise. (*Heimskringla* 1932, 1:5)

Snorri's famous words assume not only that the poems were recited orally before their subjects, but also that the verses were handed down thereafter unchanged in oral tradition. Although nearly all studies of oral poetry stress the possibilities for change in oral transmission, skaldic poetry is a special case. In most of the metres the skalds used, virtually every syllable participates in the metrical scheme. To change a syllable is in most cases to create a verse that is in violation of the metrical rules. For this reason, it seems fair to assume that a stanza composed in the tenth or eleventh century and recorded in a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century manuscript will have undergone little or no change in oral transmission. When we do see textual variation in manuscripts, we can imagine that the verse was imperfectly understood, either in oral or written transmission.

The tabular *Skáldatal* (1954), included in some versions of *Snorra Edda* (1982), attaches poets to kings, and assigns six to Olaf Haraldsson, which is quite a healthy number. Indeed, eleven occasional verses attributed to Olaf himself have survived, all but two of them in *dróttkvætt*, the difficult courtly metre. They strike me as barely competent from a technical point of view but more direct in their emotion than much skaldic verse. The stanzas attributed to Olaf treat not only battle, as we would expect, but also admiration for the female form, a vein mined less enthusiastically in the extant skaldic corpus. None of the stanzas exhibits even a whiff of sanctity. Indeed, two of them, assigned by editors to the year 1029 and thus taken to be the last of his extant stanzas, cannot have contributed to the growing cult. Perhaps for this reason they are not to be found in *Legendary Saga* or in Snorri's rendering. They are to be found in the late, very full versions of the *Saga of St Olaf*, both in *Flateyjarbók* (1387–90), the largest Icelandic manuscript and one of the few to be extensively illustrated, and one in two other manuscripts. Olaf is said to have composed them after seeing Ingigerð, the daughter of the Swedish King Olof and the wife of Yaroslav, king of Garðaríki (Russia), while he was in exile there before returning to fight at Stiklastaðir.

While the fair steed carried the babe, I stood on a mound and
looked at the woman; the fair-eyed woman made me lose my

peace of mind. The good-looking Gefn of the path of hawks [path of hawks = arm; Gefn a woman with attractive arms] drove a carriage from the castle, the impetuous woman; one flaw strikes each man.

Early stood the precious oak each season fully green with flower, as the retainers of the earldom knew; now the tree has quickly grown pale of leaf in Garðar. The linden of the bench [woman] has bound the earth of the headdress [hair] with the tears of Mardöll [gold]. (*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 1912–15, A1:222–3; B1:212; my translation).

What is striking about these verses, attributed as they are to the great missionary king of Norway, is that each one contains a woman-kenning based on a by-name of the goddess Freyja: ‘vala slóðar Gefn’ (Gefn of the path of hawks [= of the arm]) and ‘Mardallar grátr’ (tears of Mardöll = gold). The first appears to be more innocent, since any woman’s name would do as the base word of the kenning. However, the reference to arms suggests the myth of the god Freyr’s acquisition of Gerðr, with whom he fell in love after seeing her arms. When such a kenning is used of a woman whose name contains that of the giantess turned goddess, the myth is surely close at hand. To understand the second kenning one must know not only that Mardöll is a name for Freyja, but that Freyja wept golden tears when her husband Óðr was away from her. Did Olaf wish to suggest that Ingigerð would be most attractive outside of the company of her husband Yaroslav? There is no mention of him in the two stanzas or in the surrounding prose. It is also worth noting that Freyja is said to have travelled much (according to Snorri Sturluson in his *Snorra Edda* while looking for Óðr), and the impetus for these stanzas, according to the surrounding prose, is Ingigerð riding out.

According to Finnur Jónsson (*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 1912–15, A1:221; B1:211–12), Olaf engaged in word play with a woman’s name in another of his verses. The full stanza is as follows:

It is nearly as though up out of a fire flames shot; I look further in towards the women; tell me what woman carries herself so proudly. The *prince* plus *steep cliffs* has quickly deprived me of speech. I went over the floor to drink.

The name of the woman in question is concealed in the kenning in the second to last sentence. A ‘prince,’ here *gramr*, might also be referred to with the noun *ingi*; ‘steep cliffs’ are a ‘mountain’ (*björg*). *Ingi* plus

björg is *Ingibjörg*. Although the verse is in *Legendary Saga* as well as *Flateyjarbók* and other late manuscripts, the identity of this Ingibjörg is not certain beyond her patronymic (Finnsdóttir). Probably she was the daughter of Finn Árnason who was married to Thorfinn Jarl of the Orkneys (*Óláfs saga hins Helga* 1982, 135, n. 102).

Olaf had at one time been engaged to marry Ingigerð, who had interceded on his behalf with her father in a tricky situation, but the Swedish Olof was so irritated at his Norwegian namesake that he never carried out the wedding and instead married Ingigerð to Yaroslav. If these two stanzas really date from 1029, our saint not only used pagan kennings based on a good knowledge of the pagan mythology, he used them to describe the beauty of another man's wife. *Flateyjarbók* tries to explain the situation:

From this [the citation of the stanzas] it will be most clear, that he was better disposed to Ingigerð than to most other women. It is now made apparent that for her there was the greatest good fortune, beyond all others who were friends with him.

The author of the *Passio* was not influenced by any doubt about Olaf's proper behaviour when he was visiting Yaroslav and Ingigerð:

Therefore the glorious martyr of Christ went into Russia where he was nobly received by Jaroslav, the magnificent king of that realm, and held in the highest esteem as long as he chose to remain. He stayed there for some time, and left the inhabitants with a model of upright life and a famous recollection of his piety, charity, kindness, and patience. (*Passio* 2001, 30)

The *Legendary Saga* also ascribes to Olaf a *dróttkvætt* poem of ten stanzas describing the siege and occupation of London in 1016–17 by Knud the Great. Critics are agreed that the attribution to Olaf is secondary (Jónsson 1920–4, 465), Guðnason 1982, xcv–xcvi, Poole 1987, 283), and other sources attribute it to anonymous soldiers, whence the general title *Liðsmannaflokkur*. The attribution to Olaf is interesting even so, for the poem is addressed to a woman, a 'chaste widow' in a stone building or town who is usually taken to be Emma (Poole 1987), whom Knud later married. Olaf's later biographers apparently had no difficulty in imagining the saint, in the warrior days that followed his conversion but preceded his kingship, describing a successful siege to a woman.

Olaf's skaldic output (and perhaps also his skaldic reputation) thus confirms the possibilities of divided opinion suggested by the author of the *Legendary Saga* and implicit in the facts of his life: despite his conversion to Christianity, Olaf may still have indulged in pagan images when composing verse towards the end of his life. Olaf may have been regarded as a martyr king, but he went into Stiklastaðir fully armed, not just with piety, as the *Passio Olavi* has it, but also with sword and armour. Snorri Sturluson, who had a stricter historical sense than most of the other medieval biographers, has him slash many an enemy. Snorri was being faithful to his skaldic sources (Fidjestøl 1997, 192–3), who reported on the battle in their usual way. In some sense the historical record starts with the skalds, and that record follows Olaf from his beginning as a skilful warrior to his end as a martyr king.

As it happens, we have part or all of a poem that is easily dateable to the years just after Olaf's death and that reports and rejoices in his miracles, namely the *Glælognskviða* (Sea-calm Poem) of Þórarinn Loftunga. The poet's patronymic has not survived; his nickname means 'praise-tongue.' We know little about him, other than that he is an Icelander and is listed in *Skáldatal* as a poet of Knud the Great and of Svend Álífuson, that is Svend the son of Ælfgyfu, whom we know as Svend Knudssen, king of Norway 1030–5. In *Óláfs saga hins Helga*, Snorri tells us that Þórarinn once displeased Knud by offering a poem that was not a *drápa*, the most complex form. Knud threatened to hang the poet if he did not expand it to a *drápa*, which he did. Nothing of that poem survives except the refrain, but we do have a few fragments of a *Tøgdrápa* to Knud, which celebrates his taking of Norway – that is, his ouster of Olaf – in 1028. Such was apparently the demand for skalds, the nature of their work, and the muddy water swirling around kings, that a skald could be numbered among the poets of two enemies.

Since the poem praises his reign, and since it mentions Olaf's miracles, there can be no doubt that it postdates the translation of Olaf's remains in 1031. Snorri cites it in the versions of his *Óláfs saga hins Helga* and says that its first stanza mentions Svend Knudssen arrival as king in Norway. Other versions of *Óláfs saga hins Helga*, such as the one in *Flateyjarbók*, state explicitly that the poem was composed about King Svend. That would possibly date it to 1031–5.

The poem as we have it now consists of ten stanzas, two of them incomplete, in the undemanding metre *kviðuháttir*. This metre was used for the genealogical poems *Ynglingatal*, *Háleygjatal*, and *Noregs konungatal*, and Þórarinn employed it for the *Tøgdrápa*. Unlike *dróttkvætt* and the related court metres, *kviðuháttir* (essentially an eddic

metre in a skald's mouth) would have been immediately and completely comprehensible to anyone who heard it. The poem is printed below as text 4.

The main point of *Glælognskviða* would appear to be expressed in stanza 9, in which Þórarinn bids Svend pray to Olaf, now a saint, to give over his realm. The verb that I have rendered 'grant' shows up in two different forms in the manuscript, *unna*, which has the sense of 'grant or bestow freely from a position of authority,' and *árna*, which is frequent in liturgical literature with the sense 'intercede for, pray,' as the saints would with God.

The meaning of the last kenning, in stanza 10, 'power-nails of book language,' is mysterious. The base word, 'power-nails,' shares its first component with the pagan mythological term for the end of the universe, *Ragnarök*, literally 'the fates of the powers,' and *regin* is used synonymously in mythological poetry with other words for the pagan gods. *Eyrbyggja saga* puts 'power-nails' in a pagan temple in Iceland, but the text was written centuries after the conversion, and the author's concept of a pagan temple was probably more influenced by Christian than by pagan traditions. The language of books was of course Latin, the language of the church. Its power-nails, it seems to me, must be the church fathers and the saints (Paasche 1914, 19, cited in Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*), not clergymen, as others, such as Finnur Jónsson have suggested.

Just as the poem ends with direct address to Svend, it begins with his arrival in Norway. According to Snorri, the jarl in the first stanza is Haraldr Þorkelsson (Heimskringla 1941, 2:399), to whom Knud had earlier given an earldom in Denmark (his father was the famous Þorkell the Tall). Snorri also says that many other illustrious men accompanied Svend, as stanza 1 states. In stanza 2 the poet accepts Svend as king in Þrándheimr (Trondheim). The choice of this name, rather than Niðaróss, as the holy city was called, is driven by the requirement for alliteration, and therefore appears innocent, but it may have been part of Þórarinn's strategy to distinguish the spiritual from the worldly ruler. Certainly the centre of the poem, stanzas 3–8, focuses on Olaf. These are the earliest records of Olaf's miracles, and here they are three in number. His body has not decayed, and hair and nails continue to grow (stanza 5); bells ring by themselves (stanza 6); and the blind are cured (stanza 7). The placement of this particular miracle directly before the admonition to beg Olaf's granting of the land or his intercession is presumably also a deliberate choice: Svend must see what the right course of action is.

These three miracles are not in the miracle list of the ecclesiastical tradition, although a closely related one is. When Olaf's retainers were washing his corpse, the water, mixed with his blood, ran from the

house into the street. A blind man passing by stumbled and fell. When he put his wet hand to his eye, his sight was restored. When he learned that Olaf's blood had cured him, he spread the word (*Passio*, 32–3). This is the first official posthumous miracle; Olaf's vision of a ladder to heaven before the Battle at Stiklastaðir was the very first miracle in the ecclesiastical tradition that grew up around Niðaróss. This blind man also appears in the sagas of St Olaf (e.g., in *Heimskringla* 1941, 2:394–6; *Óláfs saga hins Helga* 1982, 206–7). My misgivings about recognizing the miracle in stanza 8 of *Glælognskviða* have two causes. One is number; Þórarinn uses the plural, whereas the miracle elsewhere occurs to a single blind man. More important is the issue of intent. The blind man was cured when he accidentally got Olaf's blood on him – as was even Þórir Hound, whose wounds were cured on the battlefield (e.g., text 3 below). Þórarinn tells us of groups of people beseeching the holy king for a cure.

From these facts we may perhaps conclude that the very first miracles surrounding Olaf may have lacked sufficient interest to be included in the official ecclesiastical tradition compiled as the years passed. No doubt that was in part because miracles in distant Norway would have been of less international interest than ones that occurred in Ireland, Denmark, Russia, England, or even in Iceland. This is not to say that the ecclesiastical miracle tradition lacks examples that occurred at the shrine – far from it. But the very first miracles do seem to have faded out of the official tradition.

Another skald responding quickly to Olaf's sanctity was Þórðr Sjóreksson (Særeksson). From him we have one stanza of a *Róðudrápa* (Rood-poem), described in kings' sagas as a memorial to St Olaf (e.g., *Heimskringla* 1941, 2:281; *Fagrskinna* 1984, 137). Þórðr left behind only a handful of verses, but one is well known, as it holds the record (Ólason 1993, 59) for 'driven,' that is to say, multi-part kennings: *nausta blakks hlémána gífrs drífu gimsl ǫngvir*. It unpacks as follows:

nausta blakks 'steed of boathouses' = ship
hlémána 'protecting moon' of the ship = shield
gífr 'terror' of the shield = sword
drífa 'storm' of the sword = battle
gim 'fire' of battle = sword
slǫngvir 'slinger' of the sword = warrior

This six-part subject is followed by a perfectly ordinary predicate: the warrior dared – that is, was sufficiently brave – to go alongside the prince of the Northmen. The warrior in question was Þórálfr Skolmsson, a strong young Iclander who was to turn into a fairly well-known Viking adventurer. The king alongside of whom he

conducted his forays was Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri the Good, and they were advancing into the battle at Fitjar, where Hákon would be mortally wounded.

The Battle of Fitjar took place c. 960 and that of Stiklastaðir seventy years later. If Þórðr composed both a roughly contemporary poem about Þórálfr Skolmsson at Fitjar and a memorial poem to Olaf Haraldsson, he would have been blessed not only with the poetic gift but also with that gift at a precocious age and with extreme longevity. For that and other good reasons, scholars think that Þórðr's poem about Þórálfr was probably also a memorial poem. Þórálfr was in his late teens at Fitjar, so if we assign him an arbitrary life span of fifty years, Þórðr must have been a sufficiently accomplished poet to compose a memorial for Þórálfr around 990. If so, his memorial to Olaf Haraldsson must have been composed very shortly after Olaf's death. Finnur Jónsson guesses around 1031, and that does not seem unlikely. If so, it must have been occasioned by the disinterring of Olaf's body.

There are reasons, beyond his verbal audacity, to believe that the poet Þórðr was Icelandic, and despite the limited nature of his surviving verse, he has the reputation of a splendid craftsman. One turns, therefore, to the one surviving verse of his memorial to Olaf with some interest. How did an Icelandic poet celebrate the life and death of one just declared a saint? In all too typical skaldic fashion, it seems. Here is Þórðr's verse.

Átti Egða dróttinn
Áleifr þrimu stála
við ágætan Jóta
óðling, þanns klauf hringa;
skaut nær skarpt at mótí
Skǫnunga gramr' hǫnum;
Sveins vasa sonr at reyna
slær; þaut ulfr of hrævi.

(Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning B1, 303)

A literal nearly linear translation is as follows:

The lord of the people of Agðir,
Olaf, had a thunder of steels [= battle]
With the noble chieftain
Of the Jutes, the one who split rings [= king];
Shot sharply near to him
In response the king of the people of Skåne;
Svend's son was not powerless to fight;
The wolf howled over the carrion.

According to *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, the battle in question was that of Áin helga/Helgeå in 1026 or 1027. Olaf had joined forces with the Swedish King Önundr (called Anund Jakob in Swedish history, where he figures as the first Christian king), to harry in the Danish territories of Knud the Great. Knud responded with a large fleet, but in this particular battle Knud was rebuffed, according to the sagas, by means of an unusual stratagem. While Önundr managed the army on the beach, Olaf led forces up the mountain. They dammed up a lake and filled it with logs, then burst the dam the next morning. The flood of water and logs wrecked Knud's fleet, which was drawn up to the beach ready for a fight. Other sources are ignorant of the stratagem, and some give the victory to Knud, but the version I have just given is that of Snorri Sturluson, which was to become the most read of them all.

Þórðr's stanza is interesting for several reasons. The first is the simplicity of the kennings: 'thunder of steel' for battle, 'splitter of rings' for a king. The second is the cliché of the last line, the wolf howling over the dead on the battlefield (unless, of course, there is a pun here: one of the armies at the battle belonged to Úlfr ['Wolf'] Þorgilsson Sprakaleggs, whom Knud later had assassinated). Here, then, there is absolutely no sign of the saint that Olaf had presumably just been revealed to be. Indeed, Olaf, the lord of the people of Agðir, a district in southern Norway, is mentioned only once, but Knud the Great receives four kennings: noble chieftain of the Jutes, splitter of rings, king of the people of Skåne, son of Svend (Forkbeard).

Why this emphasis on Knud in a memorial to Olaf? If the poem was indeed composed just after the declaration of sanctity, it was composed very early in the curve of the growth of the cult, in a land ruled indirectly by Knud and directly by his son and wife; indeed, the first performance of the poem may very well have taken place in their presence. Knud was in 1031 still the greatest Christian king Scandinavia had ever known, although his fame was to be eclipsed by that of Olaf. Thus we may hear skaldic voices competing to fix Olaf's reputation. Þórðr allows him to be a great warrior locked into an epic struggle with Knud the Great; Þórarinn warns Knud's son that there are greater forces at play.

This one remaining verse of Þórðr's memorial to Olaf differs not at all from verse composed about Olaf before he became king of Norway and around the time of his conversion to Christianity. His court poet Sighvatr Þórðarson, probably the skald whose work has best survived in our manuscripts, composed a poem about him called *Víkingarvísur* (Viking stanzas) usually dated to 1014–15, of which fifteen stanzas remain, thirteen of them Olaf's battles, one by one. Compare stanza 10 to that by Þórðr:

Tøgr vas fullr í fögrum
 folkveggs drifahreppi
 (helt, sem hilmir mælti)
 Hringsfirði (lið þangat);
 ból lét hann á Hóli
 h^ott, 's víkingar'^ottu,
 (þeir b^oput sér síðan
 slíks skotnaðar) brotna.

(*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A1 1:215)

Ten was achieved in fair
 Army-wall's [= shield's] snowstorm [= battle]
 (Went, as the prince directed)
 At Hringsfjörðr (the army thither);
 He caused at Hóll the dwelling,
 Tall, which the Vikings owned
 (They never again asked
 For such a fate) to be broken.

Sighvatr was present at the Battle of Nesjar, fought on Palm Sunday in 915, where Olaf defeated Jarl Sveinn and became sole king of Norway. The following summer (so says *Heimskringla* 1941, 2:61) Sighvatr composed the poem *Nesjarvísur* about the battle. Fourteen stanzas survive, mostly about the battle. One, found only in *Fagrskinna* (1984, 177) notes unapologetically that Olaf's army fought a hard battle on Palm Sunday and that the poet had to await Easter while wearing a French battle helmet. As in *Víkingarvísur*, here, too, Sighvatr largely restricted himself to a statement of the facts, although since he is covering one rather than thirteen battles, he can go into a bit more depth. In both poems he makes very little use of kennings involving the names of the pagan gods, presumably because his patron Olaf was a recent convert to Christianity, and one therefore notes with greater celerity not only the Valkyrie name *Göndull* in a battle kenning but the more striking use of *Yggr* 'the Terrifying,' one of Óðinn's most important by-names. The kenning is *Yggs gjóðr*, 'the hawk or raven of Óðinn,' or a beast of battle who gorges on the fallen after the battle.

Olaf was little interested in keeping Palm Sunday holy. It was he who initiated the battle, with, according to Snorri, a stirring speech to his men that made no reference to the place of the day in the church calendar he had recently embraced.

Sighvatr also composed a memorial poem to Olaf. Modern editors assign twenty-eight full and half-stanzas to it, most, but not all, from manuscripts of Snorri's *Óláfs saga* in *Heimskringla* and from the expanded later versions of his *Separate Saga*; *Legendary Saga* does not quote from it at all. As the stanzas tend to be cited individually, the

poem as we have it is a reconstruction. Text 5 follows the standard reconstructed order.

Most of the extant stanzas assigned to the poem deal either with the Battle of Stiklastaðir or the miracles that follow, which gives us a dating of sometime after 1231. How many years later is not known, but it was composed towards the end of Sighvatr's life, and therefore probably in the early 1040s. According to later sagas, Sighvatr had planned to use a refrain based on the legend of Sigurðr and Fáfnir, but Olaf intervened via a dream woman to have the refrain based instead on the *Uppreistar saga* (Genesis) or *Uppreistar drápa*, a now-lost religious poem. This later tradition may be an attempt to mitigate the warlike Olaf who in fact turns up in the earlier verses. In what editors now take for stanza 1, he dispatches twelve men to Hel – not to Hell – on a gallows, an event that appears to date from early in his reign. We note, too, that stanza 13 emphasizes Olaf's frightening gaze. This was a characteristic of great rulers, including Óðinn, head of the gods. In stanza 14 Olaf reddened his shield in the blood of warriors and smashed his sword, red-brown from blood, into the heads of his enemies. Just after quoting this verse, Snorri states that Olaf sliced through the head of Þorgeirr af Kviststöðum with his sword, nearly severing it in half. As Bjarne Fidjestøl wryly remarked: 'This is not appropriate behaviour for a martyr' (1997, 193). Sighvatr may have hedged his bets by using the formula 'splendid king' in this stanza; it is found in heroic poetry, but it has a special poignance here because the adjective *dýrr*, which I have rendered 'splendid,' is also the root of the verb *dýrka*, 'worship,' and the first component of *dýrlingr*, 'saint.'

If we follow the modern editors' reconstruction of the poem, Sighvatr now moved on from Olaf the warrior to Olaf the saint. Stanza 15 contains the earliest reference to the eclipse of the sun that is supposed to have marked Olaf's death at Stiklastaðir as parallel to Christ's Passion. In fact astronomers have calculated that an eclipse occurred on 31 August 1030, little more than a month after the battle, and it is not difficult to imagine that the two events were seen as related, given the miracles that were reported so quickly upon Olaf's death. The ecclesiastical tradition does not report the eclipse, but the sagas do, and, following Sighvatr, they put the eclipse at the battle. Indeed, *Legendary Saga* explicitly equates the Stiklastaðir eclipse with the eclipse at Christ's Crucifixion (*Óláfs saga hins Helga* 1982, 196–7). Although some earlier historians thought that the battle must have taken place on August 31, that notion hardly seems credible. Sighvatr, who may well have been fully responsible for putting the eclipse at the battle into the historical record, was in Rome at the time (see stanza 27). Listening carefully to this stanza, we can hear him

distancing himself from the report: ‘Men say,’ he begins, and he ends by saying that he heard of the outcome of the battle from the east, that is, presumably while he was in England or one of the Atlantic islands (Henriksen 1985, 103–4), although this is somewhat difficult to reconcile with the pilgrimage and the time he spent in Sweden thereafter.

If editors have correctly reconstructed the poem at this point, Sighvatr’s declaration of absence at the battle distances him from one of the most striking stanzas about the battle. In what we now call stanza 16, Sighvatr legitimizes the claim, taken up especially in the ecclesiastical tradition, that Olaf was the victim of pagan enemies, although not by saying, as the ecclesiastical tradition does, that the enemy army was pagan and that Olaf himself would not allow pagans in his army. Indeed, stanza 22 declares that there was a ‘distinction within the army ... he bade the Christian troop to stand at his right hand,’ and presumably, the pagans on his left. Rather, he states that Þórir Hound, one of the leaders of the force opposing Olaf, was immune to Olaf’s attack because powerful charms of Finns (i.e., Sámi people) protected Þórir. The Sámi appear in Old Norse-Icelandic literature as the pagan Others (see, e.g., DuBois 1999, 123–38); Sighvatr’s stanza accuses them of aiding, albeit indirectly, in Olaf’s martyrdom. It is in my view certainly possible that this alliance of Þórir with pagan magic could have helped propel the cult of Olaf. In stanza 17 Sighvatr also associates Þórir (‘Hound’ in the first half-stanza) with paganism by referring to him with a complex kenning using an Óðinn-name, Þróttir, as the base word. Sighvatr is well known for avoiding kennings, and his choice to use an elaborate one here is certainly deliberate. ‘[I]t automatically labeled the regicide as a rotter, a spirit damned’ (Frank 1978, 67). Þórir used the magic of the Nordic pagans of forest and mountain, and Sighvatr’s kenning aligns him with the old paganism.

Snorri explains in his versions of *Óláfs saga* that while trading with the Sami Þórir had them make magic reindeer skins that could not be penetrated by weapons (*Heimskringla* 1941, 2:341); *Legendary Saga* also assigns to Þórir and his companions wolf skins, made with Sami magic, that swords will not bite (*Óláfs saga hins Helga* 1982, 194–6). According to mythic/historical tradition, Óðinn could dull the weapons of his enemies, and Þórir’s skins may well be linked with Óðinn (Lindow 2003). If so, Sighvatr’s ‘over-wrought’ (Frank 197, 28) kenning, with Óðinn as base word, seems particularly well chosen.

Unlike the careful ‘men say’ introducing the eclipse, Sighvatr is certain of other miracles. ‘I lie,’ he says in stanza 23, if Olaf’s hair does not grow like that of the living. This stanza also mentions another miracle, that of restoring the eyesight of one Valdamar of Russia, and

perhaps curing him of other ills. This miracle is not in the ecclesiastical tradition, but as we know from Þórarinn's poem, Olaf restored sight to more than one person. Indeed, Sighvatr states this aspect of Olaf's saintly powers expressly in stanza 24. He also explicitly urges that Olaf's Mass be celebrated, indicating not only that the formal cult was under way by 1040 or so, but that it may have been contested; that is, Sighvatr may well be adding to his testimony of Olaf's sanctity the admonition to act on that knowledge and celebrate the day he was born into heaven. Although we know that later in Niðaróss both that day and the day of Olaf's translation were so celebrated, we cannot know what debate may have surrounded the very first celebrations. Sighvatr's stanza can give us a sense of such debate.

Sighvatr's contribution to such a debate, and also Þórarinn's, would have been powerful, for the skalds spoke the language of tradition. Skalds and their poems were linked inextricably with the kings and great men of Norway's past, and both Þórarinn and Sighvatr also sang in praise of Knud the Great. Christianity would bring new traditions, new knowledge, and new ways of encoding that knowledge. The traditional voice must have been all the more powerful in that context. Grimkell may have been English, but Þórarinn and Sighvatr were members of the West Scandinavian speech and cultural community that stretched from Norway to Greenland. I would contend that a miracle presented in skaldic language was to some ears a more powerful miracle than one recounted in prose or in the language of the church. Þórarinn and Sighvatr provided these miracles, and Sighvatr even, as I have argued, offered a plausible case for seeing Olaf as a martyr to real pagans. In the heady winter of 1152–3, when after a visit from the English prelate Nicholas Breakspear (later Pope Adrian IV, r. 1154–9) Niðaróss became an archdiocese, with all the North Atlantic dioceses as well as those in Norway under it, one consequence of Olaf's sanctity had borne full fruit. That same winter, King Eysteinn Magnusson asked the Icelandic skald Einar Skúlason to compose a *drápa*, a long formal praise poem, about St Olaf. Eysteinn did so and called his poem *Geisli* (Sunbeam). This stately poem is one of the masterpieces of medieval Scandinavian religious literature and has been termed the greatest monument to Norway's national saint (Paasche 1914, 72). When Einarr performed the poem in Christ's Church in Niðaróss itself, great miracles took place and a sweet aroma filled the church (*Morkinskinna* 1932, 446; *Morkinskinna* 2000, 393). Where once the skaldic tradition had affirmed miracles, now miracles affirmed the skaldic tradition. Two centuries of Christian *drápur* followed, all of them influenced by *Geisli* (Chase 1993). They culminated in a great Marian tradition (Wrightson 2001).

The eleventh century was a period of enormous transition in Scandinavia. Here kings, chieftains, traders, and adventurers went from being Vikings – feared pagan outsiders – to members of the Christian world order. Olaf himself participated in and indeed embodied that transition. Born a pagan, he converted to Christianity as a young adult, lived and fought for power as his ancestors had done before him, but died and was reborn into something wholly new: a native saint. Skalds participated in this transition, and their verses showed him as he had been in life. Their participation may also have been crucial in securing Olaf’s sanctity after his death.

The Manuscripts and Translations

The first three selections below are taken from the *Legendary Saga of St Olaf* as edited by Heinrichs et al. (*Óláfs saga hins Helga* 1982). The fourth selection, a translation of Þórarinn Loftunga’s *Glælognskviða*, is based on the text as it appears in *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (1912–15). The final selection, Sighvatr Þórðarson’s *Erfidrápa Óláfs Helga*, is also based on the edition provided in *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*.

Text 1. Legendary Saga of St Olaf (80–3)

King Olaf was a handsome man and magnificent of countenance, stocky and not tall, thick-haired, and bright-eyed, with light and chestnut-coloured hair that fell in attractive curls. He had a red beard and ruddy complexion. His face had regular features, with a broad forehead and large eyes. He had good arms and legs, small feet, was freckled and firm-eyed, amiable, and very trustworthy. Olaf was the wisest of men and saw what would serve best if he took the time to consider it. But if something was done quickly, it was risky. Olaf greatly esteemed churches and clergymen and all Christendom. Olaf endowed good men with gifts. He gave money to the fatherless, wealth to widows and to those foreigners who were impoverished. He comforted the grieving and supported all honest, upright people both with wise counsel and other advice. Olaf was hard against soldiers and against pagans, severe with thieves, an enemy of evil-doers. He kept in check chieftains and indeed all the populace. He punished harshly thieves, those men who disturbed God’s justice, but humbly forgave

what wrong was done to him.

Judgment of his conduct on this earth was mixed. Many called him imperious and ambitious, tyrannical and vengeful, stingy and greedy and savage, and an overbearing man, haughty and prideful, and a chieftain of this world in every way. But those who knew more clearly called him mild-mannered and humble, merciful and gentle, mild and meek, wise and well-liked, faithful and trustworthy, prudent and true to his word, munificent and noble, renowned and well-minded, powerful and honest, good and righteous, a wise ruler and well tempered, well heedful of the laws of God and of good men. And he has thought rightly, he who has thought thus, as there are many proofs now. If he suspected that on some occasions his own desire and God's foresight were not identical, then he frequently altered his will and did God's will. He constantly sought God's glory more than his own honour, from the popular justice of men. And may God now let his glory shine the more brightly as he glorified Him in his life and humbled himself the more before God and men.

Text 2. Legendary Saga of St Olaf (196–7)

It is said that when King Olaf got that wound he threw aside his sword and prayed for his enemies. Þórir Hound and Þorsteinn Knarrarsmiðr killed King Olaf, and Þorsteinn was immediately killed at the feet of the king. He had sworn an oath that he would first kill King Olaf if he could. Now King Olaf gave up his life there. Then the horror was so great that the sun concealed its rays and it was made dark, although previously the weather had been fair, just as it was when the Creator left this world. God displayed great horror then. There was a certain hill where Olaf fell, and on that same spot a church has been built now. Then Olaf ascended out of this realm and into heavenly glory. And that was on a Wednesday when Olaf fell. Björn the Stout fell with him, and also Kolbeinn Árnason and Áslákr of Finney, and a great number of the army from Þrándheimr [Trondheim]. But when King Olaf had fallen, then God opened Þórir's eyes, and he saw where angels of God went with Olaf's soul up to heaven with a great light. It seemed to him that Olaf's soul was clad all in the most precious purple. His face seemed white as snow. After this Þórir went to Jerusalem, where he died.

Text 3. Legendary Saga of St Olaf (204–5)

But after Olaf's death it became clear to all people that he was a true saint. Three cripples were cured when Olaf's body was carried to the church. People with leprosy were cured, and there were many miracles from his flesh and blood. Þórir Hound gave witness that he saw the king in such a bright and awesome appearance that he nearly went blind. And when he went near him, the king's blood ran down onto the shaft of Þórir's axe. Þórir's fingers had been nearly cut off, but they were healed immediately by it as if a silk thread had been wound around them. 'And we give witness to his sanctity,' said Þórir.

Text 4. Þórarinn Loftunga, Glælognskviða (Sea-calm poem)

- 1 It is unconcealed,
how the Danes made
a useful journey
with the king.
There was the jarl
at the beginning
and each man
who accompanied him:
one fellow
better than the next.
- 2 Now has for himself
a seat arranged
the king of peoples
at Þrándheimr [Trondheim];
in that place will ever
his life through
the breaker of rings [= king]
rule the settlements.
- 3 In that place where Olaf
previously dwelled,
before he moved
to the heavenly kingdom,
and where,
as all know,
a living burial
was made of his royal personage.

4 Harald's son
had boldly
arranged for himself
entry to the heavenly kingdom,
before the gold-breaker [= king]
became a reconciliation [?] ...

5 So that there
the praiseworthy king
lies pure,
his body intact,
and on him,
as on a living man,
the hair and nails
[are able to] grow.

6 And church bells
[are able to] ring
of themselves
above his bed of wood wall [= coffin],
and each day
peoples hear
the sound of bells
above the royal personage.

7 And up there
on the altar,
pleasing to Christ,
candles burn;
thus has Olaf,
before he died,
free of sin,
saved his soul.

8 And the multitude of people,
where the holy
king himself is,
bow for a benefit;
and praying,
blind men seek
the counsel of the king
and leave healthy.

9 Pray to Olaf
that he grant you

– he is a man of god –
his territories;
he will provide
from God himself
peace and prosperity
to all men.

10 When you extend
your prayers
to the power-nails
of book language.

Text 5. Sighvatr Þórðarson, Erfidrápa Óláfs Helga (Memorial Poem to St Olaf)

- 1 Twelve trees [men] of the fires of the river [= gold], I heard,
were certainly taken; King Olaf mercilessly caused the death of
them; I saw the king of Sweden's men of battle ride Sigarr's
horse [= the gallows] to Hel; great evil was quickly made for
the men.
- 2 The giver of gold got all Upplönd and there built Christianity,
which sword beaters [= men] maintained; previously eleven
destroyers of the speech of the prince of caves [gold; destroyers
of gold = kings] ruled them, but men certainly redeemed
hostages.
- 3 The heather fish [= snake] of the flight-shy son of Tryggvi
[Olaf Tryggvason; his snake = his warship *Ormr inn langi* 'the
long serpent'] carried as booty gills reddened by ground gold;
God desired it thus; Olaf the Stout caused a second *Vísundr*
['Bison,' ship-name], fully prepared, to tread the waves; the sea
thoroughly washed the animal's horn.
- 4 They who often carried out raids offered red gold to the
powerfully minded ruler to buy themselves off, but the king
refused; he ordered the men's hair [= heads] cut off with a
sword; so shall a land be defended from an army; men suffered
a clear punishment for theft.
- 5 The highly excellent (*margdýrr*) king, the one who most fed
wolves, smashed the brood of thieves and filchers; thus he
chopped off theft; the gracious king had every rash thief lose

both hand and foot; thus is the peace of a ruler's land improved.

- 6 It was fully known that the defender of the territory of the realm gave 'haircuts' to vast numbers of Vikings; the mild father of Magnus won much gain; I declare that many a victory of Olaf the Stout increased his status.
- 7 I heard that Þórðr on that occasion hardened [= fought] full battle with spears with Olaf; battle was joined; good hearts went together there; Ögmundr's brother carried high the pole, beautifully gilt, before the battle-bold prince of the Hringir [= Norwegians]; the brave one did the job fully.
- 8 Olaf the Stout got men killed; often the battle-daring one won victory; the seigneur of conquerors went forth in a byrnie [mail shirt].
- 9 It was a fierce sorrow to me that the prince had too few troops from the east; that ruler squeezed the sword grip wound with gold; those men got victory because they were half again as many; that ensnared the inciter of battle.
- 10 The earth spread widely under the feet of men; a ban on peace was there; then the army clad in byrnies did rush into fearsome battle, when quickly [or early] the users of the elm [= bow; its users are warriors] rushed down with bright helmets; great grew the gust of steels [= battle] at the site of Stikl [= Stiklastaðir].
- 11 The banner of the men from Þrándheimr [Trondheim] went forward into the middle of their formation; the wealthy farmers (*búendr*) regret this deed now; brave men met there.
- 12 I heard that my lord went forward most as the man closest to his banners; the pole went before the prince; ample battle was there.
- 13 I think it was terrifying for warriors to look into Olaf's sharp eyes; warriors from Þrándheimr [Trondheim] did not dare gaze into the serpent-shining eyes of Olaf; the king seemed terrible to them.
- 14 The bloody sword in men's hands reddened the shield in the blood of warriors, where the host attacked the splendid king; and the king, doughty in play of irons [= swords], caused the

red-brown sword to be located in the enclosures of the hairline
[= skulls] of the people of Inner Trøndelag.

15 Men say it is no small miracle, when the cloudless sun could not warm [lit. 'shelter'] the horse-Njörðungar [= warriors]; a powerful sign concerning the king occurred on that day; the day did not achieve fair colour; I heard of the outcome of the battle from the east.

16 The generous chieftain himself learned clearly how the very powerful magic formulas of the magic-controlling Finns [= Sámi] protected the vain Þórir, when the giver of gold struck with a gold-chased sword the shoulders of Hound; dully it bit not at all.

17 The fir-tree of riches [man] denies the true excellence of brave Hound, who upbraids Þórir; but I know it from home; who could see a greater deed? When the Þróttir of cross-fences of the storm of the battle-hall [= battle; its cross-fences are shields; Þróttir of shields is a warrior, here Þórir Hound], the one who fought his way forward, dared to hew at a royal person.

18 I heard in addition that Björn fully taught the king's marshals before how it was fitting to maintain faith towards their lord; he fought in the vanguard; he fell in the army among faithful men of the retinue by the head of the renowned chieftain; that death is praised.

19 Hard is the desolation after the enemy of the English [= Olaf], since warriors deprived the ill king of his life; the hard shield was riven by the prince; a battle-eager band took Olaf's life, where the army clove shields; the chieftain went to the meeting of points [battle], but Dagr fled.

20 Trees of the skerry of battle [= shield-trees = men] did not previously know that strength of free farmers nor of a chieftain; people arranged the death of the prince; when trees of wound-fire [= blood-trees = men] killed such a prince with attacks as Olaf was, a great noble retinue lay in blood.

21 Olaf ruled the land overall fifteen full winters before he died, that soul-decorated head, because of that grace; what more prominent ruler could have acquired for himself the ends of the northern world; the ruler of the army lived [a] shorter [life] than he should have.

22 Some warriors believed in God; there was a distinction within the army – the prominent chieftain fought twenty battles; famous, he bade the Christian troop to stand at his right hand. I pray Lord God to receive well [alt: rejoice in] the averse-to-flight-father-of-Magnus.

23 I lie, if Olaf does not have growth of hair like live gods of the yew [= bow; its gods = men]; I adorn the king's envoys [= men] in my praise [= poem]; the hair that grew out of the bright skull of the one who gave sight to Valdamar in Russia maintains itself; he got freedom from injury.

24 A gilded coffin is made around my lord, who bore a good heart; I praise the holy prince; he sought God; many a tree of the ring [= man] who once was blind goes quickly away from the famous resting place of this pure king.

25 It avails us to celebrate the Mass of the father of Magnus, Olaf – the king enhances God – piously, in my house; I am obliged to keep without treachery the sanctity of the painful death of this king, the one who endowed the branches of my hand [= fingers] with red gold.

26 The day of death, sent for my lord.

27 On a good journey to Rome, tired of battle, I left behind the wand of Gjöll [= sword], wound with gold, which the king gave me; when I put aside the precious sword, a silver-hilted weapon, which does away with the hunger of the husband of the she-wolf [= wolf], we followed a consecrated staff.

28 The prince of Jordan did formerly send four angels out of heaven; rapids [= water] washed the holy hair of the ruler of the world.

Sacred Non-Violence, Cowardice Profaned: St Magnus of Orkney in Nordic Hagiography and Historiography

MARIA-CLAUDIA TOMANY

St Magnus ruled as earl of Orkney together with his cousin Hákon Pálsson until Hákon ambushed and killed him at Easter 1117. About twenty years later, he was canonized as ‘the perpetual earl of Orkney.’ The cathedral in Kirkwall for which the foundations were laid by St Rögnvald the Crusader, Magnus’s nephew, in 1137 and which belongs to the biggest medieval church buildings in the North, is dedicated to him. Like many of the other Scandinavian saints, he was a royal martyr. His cult, which quickly spread throughout Scandinavia but found especially many followers in Iceland, was effectively ended through the Reformation. In modern times, St Magnus has been rediscovered, and he is now venerated mainly for his pacifism which seems to show itself in his famous refusal to fight in the Battle of the Menai Strait, and in the willing acceptance of his martyrdom. Nobody has gone further in this interpretation than the Orkney author George Mackay Brown, who in several works has described Magnus as a successor of Christ, God’s sacrifice to the world, and paralleled his suffering with the butchering of innocent victims in the death camps of the Nazis.

The Earldom of Orkney

The Orkney Islands are about seventy islands, just a few miles off the northern coast of Scotland. Today, they form the Orkney Islands Council, Scotland’s smallest local authority, but in the Middle Ages they belonged to the earldom of Orkney, which included Shetland and for a while also parts of the Scottish mainland, namely the historical counties of Caithness and Sutherland, and the coastal areas of Ross and Cromarty. Archaeology and a number of hints in written

documents show that these regions had been Pictish before the Scandinavian settlement of the islands started in the ninth century AD (Thomson 2001, 1–23). While earlier researchers held that the islands were barely populated when the first Scandinavian settlers arrived (Brøgger 1929, 56–67; Shetelig 1940, 21), the question of whether the two cultures coexisted for a while (Ritchie 1974) or whether the original inhabitants were all subjugated or killed by the invaders (I. Crawford 1981) has been debated hotly for over a quarter of a century. The complete loss of the Pictish language and Pictish place names in the region, however, make a more radical change likely.

Still, the legal nature of the earldom's relationship with Norway is unclear, especially in the early centuries. Orkney must have been settled around the time the unification process started in Norway. At what time the Norwegian kings became strong enough to maintain permanent control of the islands cannot be decided, but *Orkneyinga saga* places that transition already in the reign of King Harald the Fairhaired (chapters 4–8). Historical evidence shows, however, that at least under Earl Thorfinn the Mighty around the middle of the eleventh century, obvious attempts were made to turn Orkney into an independent dominion (B. Crawford 1986, 33–5). Officially, the earls of Orkney received their earldom in feoff from the Norwegian king, and it is instructive that the Church of Orkney belonged to the Scandinavian church organization, from 1152 on to the new metropolitan see of Niðaróss/Trondheim (Helle 1988, 54).

One of the factors that made the history of Orkney as dark and violent as it seems to have been is the fact that the succession to the earl's throne was not clearly regulated. The sagas, including the *Magnúss saga lengri*, describe a confusing mixture of procedures: the earldom appears to have been inherited from father to son but inheritance through the female line is also documented, for example, in the case of Earl Rögnvald, the son of Earl Magnus's sister. There is a sense that the farmers and noblemen of the earldom have to accept the pretender, and finally, the earls have to be formally invested by the Norwegian king. But Orkney, like Norway, also offers a possibility for several earls, usually brothers or cousins, to share or to divide between them the rule of the islands. Some earls also held part of the Scottish mainland in feoff from the Scottish king and had de facto two feudal lords. This unclear situation forms the background for the power struggle in the legend of St Magnus. And like many of his predecessors and heirs, Magnus's rival Hákon enlists the help of the Norwegian king to get his inheritance, a game that the superior power of the Norwegian king at sea makes a very dangerous one indeed, as the case of King Magnus's expedition to the West reflects.

One might wonder what makes this peripheral dominion so

attractive. A look at a map of the Atlantic region in its totality shows, however, how the Northern and Western Isles lay in front of Britain and Ireland like stepping stones for the seafaring Scandinavians. From Bergen on the west coast of Norway it was only a two-day journey across the North Sea to Shetland, and from there one could either travel on to the Faroes, Iceland, and Greenland, or to Orkney and westward to the Hebrides and the Isle of Man which were also all under Scandinavian control, and from where one had easy access to the unprotected coast lines of Ireland, Wales, and England where great opportunities for both raiding and trading could be found.

For the Christian countries of Europe, these Viking raiders were nothing but pirates and robbers. It is therefore very strange to see a saint's legend that features a Viking as its spiritual hero, and the author – or authors – of *Magnúss saga lengri* go to great lengths to explain how this could be. From this viewpoint, it is interesting to note how the saga connects its evil hero, Earl Hákon, with the Norwegian dynasty, with witchcraft and heathen prophesy ([chapter 7](#)), whereas it constantly highlights Magnus's connections with the royal house of Scotland, bishops, and clergymen, as well as the Norman rulers of England.

Behind this polemical depiction, however, there seems to have been some historical truth: cultural currents flowed in both directions in those border regions, and one of the main influences that Norway received from the British Isles was Christianity, an influence that showed itself both in doctrinal, liturgical, architectural, and organizational aspects (Helle 1988, 46–7). Norman England and Scotland did have a strong influence on Orkney, and how could it have been otherwise? The distance between the Scottish mainland and the Orkney Islands was less than twenty miles, whereas Bergen was almost three hundred miles away. A trip to Norway often took weeks on end, as we read in the sagas, whereas the Pentland Firth could be crossed within a few hours. The effect was that a mixed Norse-Scots culture developed in the Orkney earldom. During the twelfth-century renaissance in Orkney, which became both culturally and economically a highpoint in its history and which forms the historical background for the lives of both St Magnus and his nephew, St Rögnvald, many aspects of art, culture, and everyday life bore witness to this phenomenon; the most striking evidence is probably the fact that many people could speak both Scandinavian and Celtic dialects in the islands (Guðmundsson 1997, 276–8).

It is therefore not the 'scottification' of the islands, as earlier scholars have maintained, that brought the end of their Golden Age (Wainwright 1962, 190–1), but rather a number of economic and political changes both in Norway and in Scotland that led to Norway's

gradual loss of control in the islands from the thirteenth century onward and that ended with the island's pawning in 1468 (Thomson 2001, 148–88).

The Legend of St Magnus

There are four medieval Scandinavian sources of St Magnus's life, which we will consider here: a Latin *vita*, and three Old Norse sagas that all contain his *vita*, his miracles, and the circumstances of his canonization.

The Latin legend is titled *De sancto Magno martyre glorioso*, and it is preserved in AM 670 fol. 4to, a paper codex from the eighteenth century. The manuscript's origins are unknown; all we know is that there is another manuscript in the same hand, which contains a Latin version of the legend of St Ansgar. The text is not extant in any other manuscript, but in AM 670 4to there is a note by Árni Magnússon, the Icelandic polymath who, by an order from the Danish king, collected the Icelandic manuscripts in the early eighteenth century, that he owned two parchment pages that were bound into a (now lost) copy of Snorri Sturluson's history of the Norwegian kings (*Heimskringla*) and that contained the legend of St Anna and the beginning of the legend of St Magnus (*Orkneyinga saga* 1965, cxxviii).

The three Old Norse sagas of St Magnus are all related, as textual evidence shows. The longer and the shorter version of St Magnus tell very similar accounts of his life but they vary greatly in length. The relative shortness of the *Magnúss saga skemmri* (see *Magnúss saga lengri* 1965) seems to derive from an almost complete absence of theological commentary, which on the other hand abounds in the longer version, *Magnúss saga lengri*, from which excerpts were translated here. The shorter saga of Magnus is also very similar to the chapters about St Magnus in *Orkneyinga saga*. The longer version is usually considered to be much younger than the shorter version. One reason for that is certainly that the manuscript in which the shorter version is preserved, AM 235 fol., is a parchment manuscript from the fourteenth century and thus much older than AM 350 4to, the eighteenth-century paper manuscript of the longer saga of Magnus. Another reason is the difference in narrative style. The shorter saga is described as clear, concise, and dry, whereas the other one is characterized as 'verbose and full of irrelevant learned insertions' (Simek and Pálsson 1987, 237).

The *Orkneyinga saga*, the saga of the earls of Orkney, narrates the

same events of St Magnus's life as the two sagas of Magnus but here the story is integrated into the historical context of the earldom. From the beginning, the history of the Orkney earls is marred by rivalry between family members, and *ættarvíg*, murder among relatives, is the theme that unites the lives of all earls from Nórr and Górr, the grandsons of the mythical forefather of the clan, to Hákon and St Magnus. In many cases, it is possible to detect a stronger allegiance of one of the competing earls with the Scottish king and the other with the Norwegian king, and it is tempting to consider this narrative structure a symbolic representation of the two cultures that coexisted and sometimes clashed in the islands.

Magnus is not the only saint of *Orkneyinga saga* either. He is the uncle of St Rögnvald, under whose reign Sveinn Ásleifarson – Eric Linklater's 'ultimate Viking' – dies and Orkney's Viking days come to an end. In Rögnvald's person, the twin nature of Orkney culture is united, and with his crusade to Jerusalem, Orkney quite literally joins the other European nations by taking part in a battle, in which the old Scandinavian warrior ideals find glorious validation in a Christian context.

The question of the relationship between the three Old Norse texts has not been debated broadly. The commonly accepted notion (*Orkneyinga saga* 1965, cxxix; Simek and Pálsson 1987, 237) is that the shorter saga of Magnus is based on an excerpt from *Orkneyinga saga*, while the text of the translation below, the longer saga of Magnus, possibly based on a different redaction of *Orkneyinga saga* that is now only preserved in a Danish translation from the beginning of the eighteenth century (Holm. Isl. 39 fol. papp.), adds a lot of flowery commentary.

The relative young age of the manuscript of the *Magnúss saga lengri*, however, does not necessarily indicate a late dating for the text redaction; quite on the contrary, the paper copies that were made under Anders Vedel, Árni Magnússon, and the other Copenhagen antiquarians were usually philologically correct copies, mostly of manuscripts that were considered old and precious.

The stylistic argument seems even more contentious. It is based on an a priori assumption that the 'original' Old Norse saga style is precise and laconic whereas the more verbose, Latinized style presents a later, corrupted stage of Norse prose. However, it is a well-known fact that hagiography predates saga-writing in the North, and that many of the older saints' legends are translations from Latin (Schier 1970, 121). Even the saga writer himself contends that his saga is based on a Latin legend of St Magnus, by a certain Master Robert ([chapter 1](#)). The identity of this Master Robert is not known but

Robert or Roðbert as it is spelled in the text, is not a Norse name, and it has been guessed that the name might refer to Robert of Cricklade, who is also assumed to have composed the *vita* of Thomas à Becket (*Orkneyinga saga* 1965, xlv– xlv). The saga informs us furthermore that Master Robert wrote this legend twenty years after St Magnus's death (chapter 28), which would make it the year 1137. In that year Earl Rögnvald, the later saint, had the foundation stone laid for St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, and it is likely that some text was written for presentation at that occasion. It is therefore possible that *Magnúss saga lengri* could indeed be based on this much older text, and that the life and miracles of St Magnus could have formed the beginning of the *Orkneyinga saga*, just as the life and miracles of St Olaf formed the original core of the historical kings' sagas (Schier 1970, 12–13). Much in the same way as in the sagas about St Olaf, the theological commentary of the St Magnus legend would not have been added, diluting an already existing, succinct historio-graphical account, but it would, quite on the contrary, have been cut in an effort to concentrate on verifiable facts. The terse and laconic style of Old Norse historiography would then appear to be the endpoint of a long development in vernacular writing, not its beginning.

While the three Old Norse accounts relate the same events from Magnus's life, the Latin legend differs in major points. According to *De sancto Magno martyre glorioso*, Magnus got into bad company at a young age and became a Viking, a *praedo marinus* (*Legenda de Sancto Magno* 304). King Magnus Barelegs's campaign to the West is classified as unjust warfare: Magnus set out 'utpote exterarum nationum invasurus' (304), in order to invade foreign nations, and the account continues, 'King Magnus took [St Magnus, his father, and his brother] prisoner and forced them to fight with him against his enemies.' Most of the historical details being left out, it is a memorable point that it was the Norman king 'Henry the son of William, by just law king of England' at whose court Magnus bettered his ways. When he finally claims his heritage, the false and tyrannical cousin Hákon offers to give him his share in a secret plan to kill him as soon as he sets foot on Orcadian soil. When Magnus recognizes the trap, he heads to church to take Holy Communion. Hákon's henchmen pull him from the altar at the very moment when he receives the host, desecrating the church in the worst possible way. Magnus then gladly accepts his death. The main point here is clearly not his life but his sacrilegious murder: 'justus ab iniustus injuste rapitur,' the righteous was captured unrighteously by the unrighteous (307). The innocent Magnus, endorsed as true earl of Orkney by church, law, and the Normans, is treacherously killed by the tyrant Hákon and his followers, 'the servants of Belial' (306).

The *Magnúss saga lengri*, on the other hand, which the translation below presents in excerpts, proposes clearly to tell us ‘about Magnus and his gloriously virtuous life style that we all should follow and take as a holy example’ (337), and indeed the saga devotes twenty pages to his life, as opposed to one in the Latin account.

After an ideal childhood – we read – Magnus becomes a Viking through bad company here also. King Magnus, the Norwegian king, takes the cousins, Earl Hákon and Earl Magnus, with him on his campaign to Wales. But while the account runs very similar to the one in *Orkneyinga saga*, there are also significant differences: King Magnus makes St Magnus his cup-bearer, and the participation in the campaign promises both riches and honour. First, the king takes control of Orkney and the Hebrides with St Magnus’s and his cousin’s collaboration. We can assume that since these earldoms are given in feoff, King Magnus has the right to summon his retainers and decide over his lands. But when King Magnus attacks Wales, Magnus refuses to fight, announcing, ‘I have no issues with any man here, and therefore I do not want to fight.’ It is an attack on ‘*exteras nationes*,’ we could say with the *Legenda*, not a just war, and a just ruler does not engage in this.

What Magnus does then, is an act both of bravery and of revolt. In a Viking sea battle, naturally, the decks of the ships are the battleground. Magnus chooses to sit right in the middle of the fighters, in the *fyrirrum*, the middle part of the deck, without coverage. It is a victory for the Norwegians, but bought with severe losses, and the author exclaims: ‘Everyone can see from this, that this was the most beautiful miracle, that he should not be injured in such heavy rain of arrows and din of weapons ... But God preserved him for a greater crown and honour than to fall there.’

It is interesting what Magnus does during battle: he sings psalms from the psalter, the Book of Psalms of King David, the shining example of the righteous ruler. Many of them have a common theme, which is God’s help in David’s fight against the wicked and unjust. No matter which psalm he might have sung, they must all have sounded defiant to the ears of King Magnus. ‘Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.’ ‘The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy. But their swords will pierce their own hearts, and their bows will be broken’ – a warning resounding throughout *Orkneyinga saga* as well. And, ‘Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither’ – just like King Magnus who was victorious in this battle, died stealing cattle in Ulster, ‘withering like

the grass,' and the dominion he built up by war was built on sand.

Peter Foote has compared Magnus's action with other refusals to fight, for example with St Martin who put his weapons down to become a soldier of God, or with Moses who stood by and invoked divine help in Joshua's battle against Amalek (Foote 1988, 200). He follows with his classification of Magnus as a 'non-combatant holy man' the modern Catholic tradition which counts St Magnus among the 'revolutionary saints in the battle for justice and human rights' (Markus 1993, iii).

However, Magnus had not refused to fight before, and he would fight many battles afterwards. He does not reject fighting on principle. In the refusal scene, the Norwegian king challenges him and contends that it is not because of his *trú* that he refuses to fight but out of fear. *Trú* has in this passage always been translated as 'faith' but it is notable that Magnus did not cite his faith as a reason so the king's reply seems unmotivated. It is therefore worth considering if *trú* here does not rather denote its original meaning, 'faithfulness, loyalty,' because it will indeed turn out later that Magnus has friends in Wales, among them a bishop with whom he seeks refuge on his flight from the Norwegian king. The conversation between the king and the earl would then be about just reasons to go to war, and not about the principle of non-violence.

Considering that both the Norwegian king and Earl Magnus are Christians, this scene cannot be interpreted as a confrontation between a pagan warlord and a meek Christian pacifist. In the Norse context of the legend, one could look at the opportunity to be King Magnus's cup-bearer and to fight and loot by his side as a temptation presented to Magnus: it offers Magnus riches and honour, it appeals to his greed, a cardinal sin that finds much mention in the longer saga of Magnus. The king's taunts that he simply does not dare to fight could be read as another temptation to his pride that he has to overcome. But, the longer saga of Magnus concludes: 'When St Magnus recognized that it would bring him neither honour nor salvation of his soul to stay any more with King Magnus, he decided instead to do what God told him.' This incident is the inception of his conversion from Saul to Paul.

It is also interesting to look at his death both in the Latin version and in the longer saga of Magnus. Whereas the Latin version highlights the depth of Hákon's wretchedness and maximizes the sacrilege of Magnus's death by having him torn away from the steps of the altar in the very moment when he is about to receive the host of Holy Communion, the longer saga of Magnus concentrates on the saint's willingness to die: the wave that suddenly washes over him on the way to the peace meeting tells him clearly of his imminent death.

When he sees Hákon and his men approach, he knows that he has been betrayed but he does not run. He takes his last Communion before Hákon's men come to capture him. He forbids his men to defend him. When Hákon chooses to kill him, Magnus is granted his wish to make his last prayer, and, alone on the floor, he gives himself as a sacrifice to God. Then he hands the reluctant henchman his coat and exhorts him to deal the deadly blow to his head. Through these changes to the narrative, St Magnus becomes like Christ, and like the son of God who gave his own life for the peace and redemption of the world, Magnus gives his life for the peace and redemption of the people of Orkney.

Every single incident in Magnus's life is similarly exemplary; he even marries just to make it harder to resist the temptations of the flesh. *Magnúss saga lengri* offers a completely moralized version of the saint's life, and his innocent death is only the last and ultimate achievement in a life full of virtues that are less heroic but more important and more attainable for the audience: humility, obedience, generosity, charity, justness, honesty and plain speech, and chastity. He is an ideal Christian ruler but also an ideal Christian believer.

When we now look again at *Orkneyinga saga*, we can see that it follows closely the facts of the longer saga, in many places word for word. But the comments of the longer saga are not insipid insertions; they structure and give meaning to St Magnus's *vita*. Without these theological explanations, the text opens up and becomes ambiguous. When the divine logic of Magnus's reasoning is confronted squarely with the profane pragmatism of his worldly counterparts, when his acts are presented without the translation of their sacred meaning, his story at times verges on the ridiculous: a man sitting in the middle of battle but not taking up his arms, wedding but never consummating the marriage, fighting for his earldom for years in order to suddenly commit suicide. Especially because of these clashes between Old Norse warrior ethos and Christian conduct, the *Magnúss saga lengri* must have relied on commentary to convey its message. Therefore, it seems more likely that the historian composing *Orkneyinga saga* around 1200 excerpted the facts from the legend of St Magnus, the just king, than that a theologian later sat down to give meaning to Earl Magnus's enigmatic behaviour.

The Historical Background of Magnus's Canonization

Even a cursory look at the general situation at the time around St Magnus's death in 1117 shows that it is a period of major change. Scandinavian power has started to decline in the western Atlantic regions, the Anglo-Norman military, cultural, and political predominance has forced the North to face south and open up toward Europe, and the church is rapidly turning into an international organization second to none in wealth and political control.

In Norway, we see a sharp decline in its power exactly at this time. Earl Erlend of Orkney, St Magnus's father, had fought with the Norwegian king at Stamford Bridge in 1066 when the last all-Scandinavian attempt to seize control of England was finally defeated. St Magnus himself took part in King Magnus Barelegs's campaign to the Western Isles in 1095, which was the last Norwegian war waged across the Atlantic. At the same time, dramatic changes took place in England and Scotland: the Normans had conquered England; in 1097 the Scottish were defeated and the kings of Scotland were now vassals of the Anglo-Norman king (Donaldson 1988, 1). This had profound effects on Scottish concepts of cultural identity. Brendan Smith (1999, ix–x) has summarized Dauvit Brown's arguments (1999, 135–53) succinctly: 'In seeking to fulfill their ambitions to join the Anglo-French culture-club while retaining political independence from England, the kings of Scotland found it useful to draw upon their country's historical associations with Ireland.' The same could well be said about the Orkney earldom: also in Orkney we can observe stronger efforts to define the earldom as an independent political unit, and under the overwhelming influence of foreign cultural influences, the earls found it useful to draw upon their historical associations with Scandinavia. The creation of a national saint after the pattern of St Olaf, the *rex perpetuus Norvegiæ*, must have appeared as an interesting way to secure widespread support among the people for the transformation of the ruling clan into the permanent House of Orkney.

Evidence for this development can also be gleaned from a peculiar scene at the beginning of the *Orkneyinga saga*. When the first earl of Orkney, Rögnvald of Moere and Romsdal, receives the islands in feoff, he decides to stay by the king's side and give Orkney to one of his sons. Each of them steps forward and asks for the earldom. But his first son, he declares, is destined to make the clan the most powerful family in Norway. To his second son he says: 'Your fate will take you to Iceland. You'll have plenty of descendants there, and they will be thought of as the noblest of men.' The third, Einar, receives the islands. His fourth son was away at the time. This fourth son, the saga explains, was Rollo the Norseman who conquered Normandy ([chapter 10](#)). In other words, the Norman king Henry I, grandson of William the Conqueror, and St Magnus are only seven generations away from

the same forefather. It is therefore tempting to look at the historiographical use of the sanctity of Magnus as a 'clean bill of Christianity' in the Orkney application package as civilized rulers on a par with the other members in the 'Anglo-French culture club.'

As far as the situation of the church is concerned, Orkney, like all Northern European countries, used to have a proprietary church system: churches were built by rulers and wealthy land-owners and the clergy were employed as servants by the owners of the churches (Helle 1988, 52). In the twelfth century, under Pope Gregory VII (r. 1073–85), this system was abolished. Through the collection of the tithe, the celibacy of the priests, and most importantly through the sole right of the church to control the ordination of priests and the investiture of bishops, the church was turned into a wealthy and powerful supranational organization.

With the bishops so dramatically empowered, the foundation of national church organizations became crucial: Orkney's first resident bishop had his see at Christ Church, right next to the Earl's Palace at the Brough of Birsay. He was consecrated during the reign of Earl Thorfinn the Mighty in 1050, which is rather early in comparison to the other Scandinavian countries. Until 1075 the dioceses of all Scandinavia belonged to the metropolitan see of Hamburg-Bremen but most of the bishops at the time were peripatetic bishops who served at the rulers' courts and went from there on missionary expeditions (Andersen 1988, 57–60). Only twenty-five years later all Scandinavian territories had their own sees. Beginning at the same time and within a period of less than a hundred years, the cults of all the major Scandinavian saints were established, for example Olaf of Norway, Knud of Denmark, Eric of Sweden, and Magnus of Orkney. All these became patron saints of their nations, and their creation served to strengthen the bonds between church and kingship (Jexlev 1988, 188). The building of St Magnus Cathedral, to which St Magnus's relics were later moved and which then became the episcopal seat of the see of Orkney, demonstrates this development clearly.

All these Scandinavian patron saints also constitute the same type of saint, the royal martyr. This means often nothing more than that the saint was a member of the ruling clan and died in a violent way that could in some way be interpreted as 'innocent,' for example, as a missionary king on the battlefield like King Olaf. In the course of the twelfth century, this type of martyr saint, however, clashed with new ideals of saintly virtue. As has been described by Vauchez, Angenendt, and others, the innocently shed blood and the miracles that followed all those violent deaths were no longer considered enough to

constitute sanctity: the heroic virtue demonstrated throughout the life of a saint gained growing importance for a successful canonization. The 'unholy life – violent death in church' type of martyrs like Thomas of Canterbury, Archbishop Engelbert of Cologne, or Magnus Erlendsson of Orkney became problematic. In those cases where several versions of a saint's legend are extant, one can therefore observe that the virtuous *vita* of the saint becomes ultimately more important than his martyrdom. *Osvalds saga* can serve as a parallel to the development of St Magnus's legend where generous alms-giving and the leading of a chaste marriage slowly turn into bigger feats than the innocent bloodshed which ended their lives.

The Cult of St Magnus

Even though the institution of the cult of St Magnus can be connected to political intentions, there is no doubt that his cult found countless devout followers among the people not only of Orkney but throughout Scandinavia and in Eastern Europe. Altar and church dedications can give us some impression of the popularity of his cult; it is remarkable that we know of only one church dedication to St Magnus in Norway, whereas there were at least ten in Iceland (Blindheim 1988, 165). Since Magnus was only an earl, not a king, and since Olaf was the symbolic ruler of Norway, for centuries the hegemonic power of the Atlantic regions, the cult of Olaf might have carried stronger nationalistic associations whereas Magnus might have assumed symbolic power for those smaller dominions. It is noticeable that the Faroese cathedral that Bishop Erlend began building around 1300 was dedicated to St Magnus and received a relic of the saint from Orkney (Blindheim 1988, 165).

The fact that Magnus was only an earl but still accepted by the church became his central symbolic feature in pictorial art. He is generally shown with a ribbon or a garland around his head, sign of a prince or duke. According to his legend, he died young, and he is therefore depicted either without a beard or with a full beard, signs of either a very young man or a young man in his best years. Traditions about the weapon with which he was killed differ, and he is therefore sometimes attributed with a sword, sometimes with an axe (Blindheim 1988, 168).

Statues, altar pieces, and murals depicting St Magnus have survived throughout Scandinavia, attesting to his great popularity. From Iceland, some remarkable embroidered altar frontals are preserved.

Some of them are done in the same technique as the Bayeux tapestry, which is called *refilsaumur* in Icelandic. Remarkable about them is also their late date: two of the preserved embroideries (Draflastaðir and Skarð) date from the late sixteenth century when the Reformation had already taken place in the rest of Scandinavia (Blindheim 1988, 177–8). Not only in the church decorations but also in the liturgy, the veneration of St Magnus has left impressive traces. Several fragments of notations for a St Magnus hymn from the twelfth century have been found; the manuscript had been destroyed and used to make manuscript bindings. Ingrid de Geer reconstructed this remarkable treasure of music history that gives us an unrivalled insight into the cultural connection of Orkney with Paris, Narbonne, and other contemporary centres in Europe (de Geer 1988, 261).

All this artwork attests, as do the few books and church registries that we have left today, to the rich gifts that have been bestowed on St Magnus altars and churches throughout the centuries. Many of those gifts, as we know for example about St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, were given in thanks for divine help received from grateful believers (Blindheim 1988, 163), and people from many places made pilgrimages to the shrine in Orkney to pray for yet another miracle of St Magnus to bless their lives.

This tradition, as other Scandinavian saints' traditions, was destroyed through the Reformation. Especially in the British Isles, the churches and altars were stripped with unrestrained brutality and ruthlessness, and hardly any artefacts have been saved. The relics of St Magnus and St Rögnvald of Orkney, however, have miraculously survived this onslaught on the Catholic traditions. High up in the large south pillar of the choir of St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, St Magnus's relics were hidden and lasted through the centuries; what are presumably St Rögnvald's relics were found in the opposing pillar (Blindheim 1988, 163).

Whereas the saints' traditions in Catholic countries thrived and developed through the centuries and were continuously adapted to the changing needs of the faithful, the cults of the Scandinavian saints were cut short. We only see them today in the alien, primitive, and colourful fragments of medieval art and writing. Especially in those areas that were under foreign rule during the Reformation, however, there was a brief nationalistic re-awakening of Catholicism as the true faith of the forefathers in the beginning of the twentieth century. Catholic Scandinavian writers like Sigrid Undset and the famous Orkney poet George Mackay Brown gave modern interpretations to the life and death of St Magnus, and his passion has given inspiration to musicians and artists: the British composer P.M. Davies, for example, published in 1973 an opera with the title *The Martyrdom of*

St Magnus. The most glorious and most widely known images of modern veneration, however, are probably the colourful painted windows with images of St Magnus and the other long-lost Scandinavian saints in the cathedrals of Trondheim and Kirkwall (Blindheim 1988, 181).

The Translations

The present translations are taken from Finnbogi Guðmundsson's 1965 edition of *Magnúss saga lengri*, the longer saga of St Magnus.¹

Excerpts from The Longer Saga of Magnús

Chapter 1: The Norse Prologue

Praise, devotion, and honour, and glory be to Almighty God, our Savior and Creator, for his manifold clemency and the mercy that he has granted to us, who live on the outer fringes of the world, or even, as many scholars have asserted in their writings, outside the world altogether. But notwithstanding this, God seems to show us his mercy, especially in allowing us to learn his blessed name, and in giving us strong support through the most blessed founders of the holy Christian faith, in whose holiness the whole Northern half of the world radiates and resounds near and far. These are King Olaf, the saint, and the illustrious Hallvard, his nephew, who adorn Norway with their sanctity; the excellent Magnus, earl of the Islands, who illuminates Orkney with his holiness and to whose honour the following story has been compiled. Also the blessed bishops belong to their number, Johannes and Thorlacus,² who have let the illustrious light of their bright dignity shine upon Iceland. Thus we can see that we are not remote from God's mercy, even though our place in the world is far from other peoples; and for that we have to give him thanks, and honour and glory all the time of our lives.

Master Roðbert, who has composed and written the story of Earl Magnus, the saint, in Latin, begins the prologue that you will now hear.

Chapter 2: Master Roðbert's Prologue

Every man shall bring the most precious thing he can afford to the tabernacle of God³ for his help and mercy: one may bring gold, others silver, some jewels, some goats' hair and red rams' skins⁴; and such offerings are not to be despised because of them is made the covering over God's tabernacle,⁵ to protect it and to keep moisture and the heat of the sun away.⁶ This sentiment can be explained with few words. Every Christian man give the best he has as an offering to God for the gifts and good fortune that he has granted him: that God's Christendom, signified by the tabernacle that Moses made for God to serve him, may be a protection and fortification against the attacks of his enemies.⁷ Gold signifies wisdom and knowledge, silver chasteness and purity, jewels the miracles of the saints, the goats' hair the repentance of sins, red rams' skins the martyrs. Now the reader might think that Saint Magnus has brought all these offerings to his Lord, as the story of his life confirms. While it is not appropriate for the mouth of a sinner to sing the praise of God, such a song may still be comforting and helpful to others, because of the sinful woman who bent down in repentance to wash and anoint the feet of the Lord ...⁸

Chapter 3: Saint Magnus's descent

In the days of the Norwegian king Harald Sigurdsson, two brothers ruled in Orkney: the earls Páll and Erlend, the sons of Earl Thorfinn who was the most powerful of all Orkney earls. He was the son of Earl Sigurd who, together with all the people of Orkney, had been Christianized by King Olaf Tryggvason. This Sigurd fell in the Battle of Brian in Ireland. The mother of Erlend and Páll was Ingibjörg, who was called the Earlsmother, the daughter of Earl Finn Árnason. Because King Harald Sigurdsson was married to Thora, the daughter of Thorberg Arnason and the mother of King Olaf the Quiet, King Olaf and the two earls were cousins. Earl Erlend was married to a woman with the name Thora; she was the daughter of Sumarlidi, the son of Ospak. Ospak's mother was Thordis, the daughter of Hall of Sida. Egill was the name of one of the sons of the aforementioned Hall; his daughter was Thorgerd, the mother of Saint John, the bishop of Holar. The sons of Earl Erlend and Thora were Saint Magnus and Erling, and Gunnhild and Cecilia were their daughters. Gunnhild later married Kol Kalason, a landed nobleman from Norway; their son was Rögnvald Kali, who later became earl of Orkney; he was a truly holy man; he was a nephew of Saint Magnus. Earl Páll, Erlend's brother, married the daughter of Earl Hákon Ivarsson and Ragnhild, the daughter of King Magnus the Good, the son of King Olaf the Saint. Earl Páll's son was called Hákon, and he will play a role in the story later ...

Chapter 6: Competition between Magnus and his cousin from

childhood on

The brothers, Earl Erlend and Earl Paul, ruled Orkney for a long time, and for a long time there was harmony between them. But when their sons grew up and matured, they became very violent and aggressive young men, Hákon and Erling, but Magnus was in every respect the most quiet and well-behaved of them. All three cousins were tall and strong men and well educated in all things. Hákon, the son of Páll, wanted to become the leader of the sons of Erlend, because he felt he was of a superior birth than the others, since he was the grandson of Earl Hákon Ivarsson and Ragnhild, the daughter of King Magnus the Good, as mentioned before, and Hákon always wanted to be better and have more than the others, whatever they did. They reached a point at which they could not agree with each other any more because many men aligned themselves more with the sons of Erlend and did not want them to take an inferior position, as they had more friends among the people, and were more popular with most men; Hákon envied them for that all his life. Therefore, the situation between the earls' sons became quite dangerous ...

But because their friends insisted so unwaveringly on their reaching a peaceful resolution, Hákon had to leave the islands and go away for a while; the advice of good men brought about a settlement between the brothers. Hákon went first east to Norway and met with King Olaf the Quiet; that was towards the end of Olaf's life; Hákon stayed there for a short time. From there he continued eastward to Sweden and met King Ingi Steinkelsson and stayed with him for a while as a respected guest at his court ...

Chapter 7: Hákon instigates the Norwegian king's campaign to the British Isles

And after Hákon had spent a short time with King Ingi, he travelled from Sweden to Norway to meet King Magnus Barelegs, his relative. While there he heard the news from Orkney that Earl Erlend and his sons ruled there for the most part and were very popular, while his father, Earl Paul, had only very little influence in the earldom. He also seemed to hear from this that the people from Orkney had very little interest in his return to the west; they had stability and peace, and they were afraid that Hákon's arrival in the islands would only bring hostility and warfare; and it appeared quite likely to Hákon that his uncle and his cousins would deny him his share of the earldom. He therefore decided to seek the help of King Magnus, his kinsman, to come to power in Orkney. He incited King Magnus strongly to harry in Scotland and Ireland and then in England, to take revenge for the death of King Harald Sigurdarson. The king answered: 'You should be

aware, Hákon, if I do this for the sake of your words, that I journey with an army west over the sea, that it should not come as a surprise to you that I will attempt to bring those dominions that lie there in the west under my power at any price, and that doing this I will not discern between friend and foe.’ When Hákon heard this, it was hard to tell what he was thinking; but King Magnus proceeded to levy a high number of ships and troops in all of Norway.

Chapter 8: Magnus – a saint and a Viking

Next we shall return to the main character of our story, the Holy Magnus, because only a short while ago you heard how impeccably he behaved and how different he was from other young men in his youth. But because many adjust their behaviour to those with whom they live, and because anyone who touches tar is soiled by it, so also Magnus, when he had come of age and grown up, surrounded by grim and immoral men who hated good morals, doubted the faith, disregarded just laws, resisted learning, readily gave in to temptation, and ridiculed and disobeyed God’s commandments; after some years he appeared just like those immoral men, and he lived like a Viking with robbers and mercenaries from theft and loot, and he was as bad a killer as any one of them; but it seems plausible that he did this more because of the perverted morals and the instigation of evil men than because of his own bad character ...

Chapter 9: St Magnus’s refusal to fight in battle

In that time, King Magnus Barelegs came from the east with a host of ships, troops and men ... On this campaign, the king planned to conquer and to harry the lands in the west, England and Ireland, as mentioned before. When King Magnus came to Orkney, he seized the two earls, Erlend and Páll, and forced them to leave the islands by sending them east to Norway; instead he made Sigurd, his own son, ruler of Orkney and appointed counsellors for him since Sigurd was only nine years of age. King Magnus ordered the earls’ sons, Magnus and Erling, the sons of Erlend, and Hákon, Páll’s son, to come and fight with him. Magnus, the son of Earl Erlend, was a tall man, adroit and fast and strong, good-looking, well-built, fair-haired and light-skinned; he appeared dignified and behaved in all situations with the utmost courtesy. King Magnus made him his cup-bearer, and he served at every meal at the king’s table. King Magnus sailed from Orkney to the Hebrides, and in that campaign he brought all the Hebridean islands under his power and captured Lögmann, the son of Gudrod, the king of the Hebrides. From there he sailed south to the shores of Wales, where he had a big battle in the straits of Menai with

two Welsh earls, Hugi the Fat and Hugi the Magnificent. But when the men broke out their weapons and made themselves ready for battle, Magnus Erlendsson sat down in the middle of the deck, where he usually had his place, and did not arm himself. The king asked why he acted like that. Saint Magnus answered: 'I have no issue to fight over with any man here, and therefore I do not want to fight. 'Well then,' the king said, 'go down under deck, but don't lie around here, in the way of my men, if you do not dare fight, because I do not think that this has anything to do with your faith.' Magnus, the earl's son, remained seated in the same place and took a psalter, sang aloud during the battle, and did nothing to protect himself.

This battle was both long and hard, but in the end, Hugi the Magnificent fell, the Welsh fled, and King Magnus was victorious although he suffered great losses, and many men were injured. Kali Sæbjörnsson had suffered many severe injuries. Magnus Erlendsson, however, had not sustained any wounds, even though he had not covered himself. Everyone can see that this was the most beautiful miracle, that he should not have been injured in the middle of such a thick flight of arrows and such violent clashes of arms, while armed fighters fell in droves all around him. But this is not as wondrous as it may seem because God preserved him for a greater crown and victory than to fall there. King Magnus thought nothing of this incident, but he began to dislike and to deride Magnus, the earl's son, because of it. And when St Magnus recognized that it would bring him neither honour nor salvation of his soul to stay any more with King Magnus, he decided instead to do what God instructed him.

Chapter 10: St Magnus flees from the king's ship

It happened one night, when King Magnus lay at anchor off the coast of Scotland, that Magnus Erlendsson secretly stole away from the king's ship. He made his bedding look as though a man lay under it. In the morning, after the king had got dressed, he asked if Magnus Erlendsson was sick. They checked and found out that he was missing. The king instructed that he be tracked down but he was nowhere to be found. Then the king had hunting dogs put on his tracks on land. Magnus, the earl's son, had injured his foot when he climbed to shore, and the hunting dogs soon found his scent. Magnus had run to the forest and climbed up into a tree. The dogs soon came upon the oak tree and barked up it. Magnus hit one of them with a stick that he had used for walking, and they fled with their tails between their legs and ran all the way back to the ships. Magnus Erlendsson stayed hidden in the forest while the king's men looked for him. Later he proceeded inland and finally arrived at the court of Malcolm, the king of the Scots, and stayed there for a while, but before that he spent some time

in Wales with a bishop ...

Chapter 12: Magnus becomes reformed

When St Magnus stayed in Scotland, he heard of the death of his father, Earl Erlend, and all the other news that has already been related. And when he had spent as much time at the court of the Scottish king as he liked, he was honourably seen off by the king with gifts and noble companions; he travelled to Caithness and was well received there, first secretly welcomed and protected, and then officially elected and honoured with the title of earl, beloved and respected among all God's friends.

And it was then, without delay, that Earl Magnus, the saint, was transformed from Saul into Paul, from murderer to preacher, and repented for the bad deeds that he had committed. He began to drown his sinful self with tears in daily laments and steady repentance, and he offered fitting atonement for his many vices and the sinful desires of his weak flesh. After that, he seemed to be a new man, one whose qualities honoured God; he had turned into a different person, from a wicked into a good man, from a sinful into a righteous man, from a wretched into a holy man, from a sordid into a pure and blessed man. This is the turning of your right hand, Almighty God! You have the power to strengthen, the graciousness to help, the readiness to reconcile, the goodness to save. In this way the holy Magnus was turned into a saint, and he began to turn the earth of his heart with the sharp plow of confession ...

Chapter 13: Hákon Pálsson returns and conquers all of Orkney

One winter or two after the fall of King Magnus Barelegs, Hákon Pálsson came from the west over the sea to Norway, and the kings gave him the title of earl and the rule of his dominion, as was his birthright. He then journeyed west over the sea and brought all of Orkney under his power with great and obvious greed, killing the innocent administrator of the Norwegian king, who held and preserved that part of the islands that belonged to St Magnus ... When St Magnus heard of this unrest that Hákon, his cousin, in open defiance of the law, had conquered his inherited land, he consulted with his men concerning what should be done about this. They finally agreed that he should wait for a while, so that the rage and greed of Hákon, his cousin, would die down, and so that it did not look as though he was claiming his inheritance in the way of a soldier but rather as a friend of the laws and of justice and in loving kindness.

Chapter 14: St Magnus claims his share of the earldom

But when the time had come that St Magnus wanted to claim what he had inherited from his father, he travelled with a considerable number of followers from Caithness to Orkney, and relatives and friends gave him a friendly welcome. He then claimed what he had inherited from his father. The farmers were happy with that, because he was popular; he had many supporters both in his immediate and in his extended family who wanted him to rule in the islands ... When Hákon found out that Magnus had come to the islands, he gathered troops together, for he rather wanted to fight than to give up his power. Mutual friends of theirs intervened and attempted a peaceful resolution. Heeding the advice of good men, they entered an agreement whereby Hákon agreed to give up half the earldom if that was the decision of the Norwegian kings.

Magnus Erlendsson then journeyed eastward to Norway and met with King Eystein, since King Sigurð was at that time in Jerusalem. King Eystein received the young nobleman very well and granted him his paternal inheritance, half of Orkney, and he also received the title of Earl of Orkney from the king, along with the most generous gifts. After that, Earl Magnus sailed west over the sea to his dominion, and his relatives and friends and all the people welcomed him joyously. Under the influence of their mutual friends, the relationship between him and Earl Hákon remained civil for many years. There was peace and there were good harvests in Orkney as long as their friendship held. The cousins, Earl Magnus and Earl Hákon, shared the defence of the earldom for a while in the manner upon which they had both agreed.

Chapter 15: St Magnus – an ideal ruler

Lord Magnus was most outstanding as a ruler, righteous and of good morals, loyal to his friends and brave at arms, fierce and victorious in battle, merciful in peace, with great authority, soft-spoken and mild, a wise man whom everybody praised. He was free with money and generous in his gifts to other noble-men, but for the sake of God's love he also gave great relief to the poor on a daily basis. He sternly punished plunder and theft, and had Vikings and other criminals killed, regardless of whether they were rich or poor. As a judge, he was not partial to his friends and he gave more consideration to the law of God than to any difference in social standing. In all things he strictly observed God's commandments, and he would always castigate himself. He had many outstanding qualities that he showed only to God himself but which he kept hidden from the people.

Chapter 16: St Magnus and his chaste marriage

But since St Magnus as earl was the leader and governor of worldly people, he also wished to emulate the private customs of worldly rulers, and he chose as his wife a virgin of noble birth. She was the purest young woman of the most powerful and wealthy families of Scotland, and he brought her back home and married her. The blessed Magnus did this, as it turned out, to follow the mysterious ways of God's will, in order to deceive the friendly temptations of this world, rather than to fulfil the desires of his body. Because he was aided by divine guidance and heavenly strength, he lived ten years with this virgin, purely and completely without partaking in any of the sins of fornication. Whenever he felt tempted by the lust of the body, he jumped into cold water and pleaded to God for help.

Observe here the strong champion of God in his daily strife: how admirably he lived with this virgin for such a long time because, even though he legally had the right to be tender towards her, with the help of the Holy Spirit's mercy he wished to choose the better way and to live unspoilt, rather than to use his right to consummate the marriage because those who do this, have to suffer the ardour of the body. For it is better and safer to preserve the flower intact than to mend one that has been damaged because no wound heals over as smoothly as uninjured skin would have been. But to be alive in the body without giving in to the lust of the body cannot be achieved with human strength, only as a gift from God. But what temptation and what pain he suffered from the ardour of his body, and what strong impulses from forbidden sensations, how hard a fight he fought and how he controlled the hard desires of the burning flesh, that can only be familiar to one who has already experienced it, whereas someone who has not, might doubt it ...

[Chapters 17–21 describe the power struggle between the two earls.]

Chapter 22: Earl Hákon will betray St Magnus

After the aforementioned peace agreement had been observed by both earls for some years, Hákon revealed himself to be a traitor, and the great wickedness that he had held back all that time poured forth from his heart. Hark, how true is the sentiment of the old poet when he says:

Nulla fides regni sociis, omnisque potestas
Inpatiens consortis erit, totum sitit illa.⁹

That means: 'Never can shared power in a worldly empire be safe, because men with power cannot tolerate an equally powerful man next to them, and they will want to have everything for themselves.' From this, you will understand which fruit is false food and which

harvest grows from greed. All sins are committed for avarice, and greed is the origin of all forbidden desires. This is apparent in Ahab, the most guileful of kings, who persecuted the prophet Elijah. This has shown itself in the most abominable Judas, who sold our Lord for money. And it is the same with the traitor Earl Hákon, according to all the evidence we have in his treacherous actions, when he betrayed his cousin, Earl Magnus, in spite of their covenant, even though there are several different narratives of their dealings and conflicts preserved.

Chapter 23: After many conflicts, the earls arrange a peace meeting

... There were many others who played a bad role in these matters, and they all belonged to Hákon's following, because St Magnus did not want to have slanderers at his court. Through this slander, it came to pass that the earls both gathered troops and they went to battle, each followed by a large army. They both steered their fleets towards Hrossey because that was where the people of Orkney came together for council (thing) meetings. And when they arrived there, they both began to bring their men into battle position and to get ready for attack. All the noblemen of Orkney were there as well, and many of them were friends of both earls, and they alone brought about reconciliation once more by going back and forth between the two with bravery and good will. This meeting took place during Lent. But because so many peace-loving men were involved in settling their arguments and everyone made such an effort to mend their friendship, the earls made a covenant with oaths and handshakes in the presence of the best men of Orkney. It was also arranged that in the spring, right after Easter, they should meet on Egilsey. Each earl should attend this meeting with two ships and equal numbers of men. Both earls vowed to keep and to honour this agreement, which the best men of the earldom had drawn up for them at that meeting. After these events, everyone returned to their homesteads ...

Chapter 24: Magnus and Hákon prepare for their final meeting

As the Easter week passed, both earls prepared for the meeting in different ways. St Magnus invited all those men that he knew to be the most peace-loving to accompany him to the reconciliation with his cousin. He had two longships, manned with the bravest warriors, as many as had been appointed. And when he was ready, he set out for Egilsey. There was no wind, and as they were rowing across the calm sea, a wave rose up next to the ship on which Earl Magnus was travelling, and it fell over the ship, exactly where the earl was sitting. These were the names of the ships' foremen: Thorstein, who was already mentioned before, Arnkell, Grim, and Gilli, and many other

capable men. They were all very astonished by this occurrence, that a wave could rise in complete calm, where never before to anyone's recollection a wave had risen and where the water was very deep. Then the earl, St Magnus, said: 'This is not so strange, even though you are all astonished. It is my premonition that this occurrence foreshadows my impending death. It can be that here the prophecy will come true that said that Earl Páll's son will commit the most heinous crime; it could be that Hákon will betray us at this meeting.' Earl Magnus's men were very frightened when he told them in this speech that he would soon die, and they begged him to protect himself and to save his life, and not to take the risk to trust Hákon. The holy Earl Magnus answered: 'I will surely go to this meeting, as was agreed, and I will not break my oath just because of a premonition; everything on our journey will go according to God's will. But if I could choose, I would much rather suffer injustice than commit it to someone else; may God let Hákon receive amends even if he does wrong to me.'

Now as for Earl Hákon, he had gathered a huge army. He had seven or eight battleships, all manned with warriors; it was a well-equipped fleet that set out for battle. But when the army met, Earl Hákon disclosed to his men that at this meeting between him and Magnus things would change, and that when it was over, they would no longer rule Orkney together. Many of the earl's men, who truly deserve to be called the sons of Satan, welcomed his decision and incited him further with many malicious remarks, but Sigurd and Sighvat Stocking, who always and again instigated evil, were the ones who made the worst suggestions ...

There was one man with Earl Magnus whose name was Holdbodi, a plain-spoken farmer from the Hebrides; he was Earl Magnus's favourite retainer; he was close to all these events, and he later gave detailed reports of the dealings and all the exchanges between Magnus and Earl Hákon, and that is what you will hear next.

Chapter 25: Hákon betrays St Magnus in Egilsey

St Magnus and his men arrived in Egilsey before Hákon. And when they saw Hákon's eight battleships, it seemed certain to Earl Magnus that this was a trap, and it was obvious to any man who had only the slightest bit of wit that such a number of armed men would not be employed for peaceful intentions. When St Magnus saw that Hákon's deviousness would now become evident, he went with his men farther up on the island to the church there in order to pray, and he spent the entire night there, not because he was scared or afraid but because he wanted to commit his fate entirely into the hands of God. Magnus's men prepared themselves to defend him and to fight against Hákon,

but he said to them: ‘I do not want you to put your life in danger for my sake. And if peace cannot be maintained between me and my cousin, then things may go according to God’s will, because I want rather to suffer evil deeds and treason than to commit them against someone else.’ This outstanding martyr, speaking those words, knew that all deception and treachery will ultimately turn against the one who commits them. Now the men understood that it was true what he had told them earlier about Hákon’s betrayal. But even though Earl Magnus knew beforehand about his impending death, be it through his own wisdom or through God’s guidance, he did not want to flee or to remove himself too far from his enemies, and it was only because of his faith that he sought refuge in the holy church. Magnus stayed awake the whole night, praying for hours; he thought about his redemption and prayed ardently; then he commended himself and his fate into God’s hands. In the morning, he had Mass sung, and in that Mass he received *corpus domini*.¹⁰ And this deed of his was most significant because it symbolized that he should become a sacrifice of God, just like the flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was sacrificed to save the whole world. But Earl Hákon, who at this time was completely removed from all love or fear of God, blatantly flouting the privileges of the church, did not shrink back from walking into the holy church, thus violating both the peace and the freedom of the church; the fact that his crime was committed in a sacred place made it appear all the more horrifying ...

On the same morning that Hákon landed on the island with his wicked men, he sent four of his men, the most wretched of his servants, those who were the most evil and the most keen on violence, to capture Earl Magnus, wherever they could find him. These four, who deserve to be called the fiercest wolves rather than thinking men because of their wickedness, ever thirsting for bloodshed, ran boldly into the church when Mass had just ended. They grabbed St Magnus and pulled him out of the peaceful embrace of the church like a lamb from the trough, threatening him with their weapons, abusing him, and screaming wildly. The holy one was held by the thralls of sin, the righteous one was bound and pulled along unjustly by the unjust, and led on the path to his avaricious judge, Earl Hákon ... He was as happy and joyous when they captured him as though he had been invited to a banquet, and his mind and heart were so calm that he did not talk to his enemies with any unfriendliness or anger or any fear in his voice.

Chapter 26: St Magnus’s last conversation with Hákon

When Earl Magnus had come before Earl Hákon, he said with great steadfastness to Hákon: ‘... I want to offer you three alternatives between which you can choose, and they are all better than breaking

your oaths and having me, your cousin, killed, innocent, as many will maintain.’ Earl Hákon said: ‘First I want to hear what you have to offer.’ St Magnus said: ‘The first option is that I will leave the country and travel to Rome or all the way to Jerusalem and visit the holy places, and that way I will atone for both of us. I will leave the country with two ships, manned with good warriors and equipped with all the necessities we need. And I will swear that I will never return to Orkney.’ This option was quickly turned down by Hákon and his men. Then Earl Magnus said: ‘Since my life is in your hands, and because I know that I have sinned in many ways against Almighty God, and I have to make amends for that, send me up to Scotland to our mutual friends, and let me be kept there with two men to keep me company, and then you can make sure that I will never leave this prison without your consent.’ They rejected this quickly and found many reasons why the suggestion was flawed. Then this brave knight said: ‘I am running out of options.’ He said, ‘Now there is only one option left that I want to offer you, and God knows that I am suggesting this not so much for the life of my body as for the salvation of your soul, because it is not decent for you to kill me. Have me mutilated, as you please, or rob me of my eyes, and then throw me into a dungeon out of which I will never escape.’ Earl Hákon replied to this: ‘I accept this compromise, and I will not demand any more.’ But Earl Hákon’s men all jumped from their seats, and they said: ‘We will not agree to merely torture Earl Magnus: we will kill one of you, because from this day on you shall not both rule the country.’ To this, Earl Hákon replied: ‘I prefer ruling the country to dying young, if you are so uncompromising in this matter.’ This is what Holdbodi reported of their exchange. After that, St Magnus fell to his knees to pray, and he hid his face in his hands and he shed many tears in the face of God, while he commended his fate, his life, and himself into the hands of the Lord.

Chapter 27: St Magnus is killed

Next, as this holy friend of God’s, Earl Magnus, had just been judged and sentenced to die, Earl Hákon ordered Ofeig, his standard-bearer, to kill Earl Magnus but Ofeig rejected that in utmost rage. Then Earl Hákon tried to force his cook, whose name was Lifolf, to slaughter Magnus, and Lifolf started to cry out loud. St Magnus said to him: ‘Do not cry,’ said he, ‘because it is a great honour for you to do this. Be brave, and you shall have my clothes, as it was the custom and law of the ancients. Do not be afraid because you are only doing this under force, and the one who forces you commits a greater sin than you.’ And when he had said this, he took his coat off and gave it to Lifolf. Then the blessed Earl Magnus asked permission to pray, which was

granted to him. He prostrated himself and entrusted himself completely into God's power, giving himself as a sacrifice to God. He did not only pray for himself; he also prayed for his enemies and his murderers, and he forgave them all wholeheartedly for what they had done to him; and he confessed all his trespasses to God and asked that they be washed off through the shedding of his blood, and then he commended his spirit into God's hands, asking God's angels to meet his soul and to accompany it up into the eternal rest of paradise.

And when this glorious martyr of God had ended his prayer, he said to Lifolf: 'Stand right in front of me, and strike me in the head as forcefully as you can, because it is not fitting for a ruler to be beheaded like a thief. Take strength, man, and do not cry, for I asked God to have mercy on you.' After that Magnus crossed himself and held his head forward, and Lifolf struck him in the head with a mighty blow. Earl Hákon said: 'Strike again!' And Lifolf struck once more, into the same wound. Then St Magnus fell to his knees, and this martyr journeyed from the wretchedness of this world into the eternal bliss of heaven. And God the Almighty let the man whom the henchman had taken from this world rule by his side in heaven. His body fell to the ground, but his soul was elevated high up to the heavenly glory of the angels.

The place where St Magnus had been bludgeoned was stony and mossy. But shortly thereafter his worthiness in the eyes of God became apparent when this stretch turned into a soft, grassy lawn. In that sign God showed that Earl Magnus had been killed unrighteously, and that he had been granted the beauty and greenness of paradise in the land of the living.

St Magnus died two days after the Mass of Tiburtius and Valerian; it was on the second day of the week that the valiant St Magnus was killed, three weeks after the Lenten St Mary's Mass. At that point, he had held the earldom together with Hákon for twelve years. At that time, Sigurð the Crusader and his brothers Eysteinn and Olaf were kings of Norway. Seventy-four years had passed since the fall of St Olaf Haraldsson. It was in the days of Pope Paschal II, and St Jón was bishop of Hólar in Iceland.

[Chapter 28: Epilogue of Master Roðbert, chapters 29–34: The end of Earl Hákon, Magnus's miracles, Magnus's canonization, the teaching of the legend of St Magnus.]

NOTES

- 1 *Magnúss saga lengri* 1965.
- 2 Bishops Jón and Þorlákr; see the chapter by Wolf in this volume.
- 3 Cf. Exod. 25:8–10, Exod. 29:42–4 (the tabernacle).
- 4 Cf. Exod. 25:2–7 (offerings to be brought).
- 5 Cf. Exod. 26:7, 36:14, and 26:14, 36:19 (goats' hair and red rams' skins).
- 6 Cf. Isa. 4:6.
- 7 Cf. Num. 10:17, 21, 33–6; Ps. 27:5–6; Ps. 61:4.
- 8 Cf. Luke 7:37–48.
- 9 Cf. Lukanus, *Pharsalia* I, 92–3.
- 10 'the body of the Lord', i.e., Holy Communion.

St Knud Lavard: A Saint for Denmark

THOMAS A. DUBOIS AND NIELS INGWERSEN

June 25 of the year 1170 marked two significant events for the kingdom of Denmark, officiated and witnessed by the chief bishop and the sole king of the realm. On this day following the feast of St John the Baptist (24 June), the relics of the Danish Duke Knud, murdered by an envious kinsman in 1131, were solemnly translated to the Benedictine church of St Mary at Ringsted to become a holy shrine and place of pilgrimage for the people of Denmark. The presiding bishop, Absalon, was one of the canniest and most militarily accomplished clerics of all medieval Scandinavia. The king, Valdemar I – himself the son of the deceased Duke St Knud – had been pivotal in obtaining papal recognition of his father's sanctity. Whereas this religious event might be seen as an expression of local and national piety, Valdemar and Absalon used the same occasion to proclaim Valdemar's seven-year old son, Knud, as heir to the throne. This latter act held preeminent political significance and sheds interesting light on the translation itself. Despite the overarching national claims of both of these acts, however, the Older Zealand Chronicle (*Vetus chronica Sialandie*) depicts the events of the day as strikingly local:

The venerable bishop Absalon executed the office in the presence of crowds of monks, clerics, lay men and women of great devotion, who cried out: 'Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, who has established St. Knud as the patron saint of Zealand!' (41)

The extent and administration of medieval realms posed many challenges to the monarchs of Scandinavia. Natural features sometimes created the basis for fairly obvious administrative units, as in the case of the island of Iceland, which became its own unified commonwealth in the early medieval period. Even here, however, the aims of acquisitive monarchs often subsumed such entities into wider, potentially unruly empires: Iceland became a subservient part of the kingdom of Norway in 1262–4 and eventually became part of the wider kingdom of Denmark in later centuries. On the continent, mountain ranges and bodies of water sometimes created convenient boundaries that limited royal ambitions, but just as often, realms were created that defiantly bridged geographic, cultural, and linguistic lines

with singular bravado. Such was certainly the case with the kingdom of Denmark, a collection of Baltic islands along with portions of larger peninsulas to the west, south, and north. At its height, this core realm claimed England and various other North Atlantic islands to the west, Norway to the north, a substantial portion of what is today southern Sweden, and various tracts on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. A Danish-dominated Kalmar Union united the entire Nordic region into a single empire for a period of centuries (1397–1523) before succumbing to a process of disintegration.

Given these geographic realities, and the fact that ancient tradition guaranteed local landowners the right to elect the person they would recognize as king, the potential for loss or reconfiguration of realms was immense. At any time, particularly in the early medieval period, an enterprising local chieftain or greedy neighbouring king might arise to claim the allegiance of landowners in a district, thereby carving off a piece of the kingdom for himself. Crafty neighbouring kings often saw the advantages of supporting one rebel or claimant over another, thereby securing a grateful neighbouring monarch or under-king in the future. The rivalry between the Nordic realms during the Middle Ages was only surpassed by the internal rivalries within the courts and dynasties of the realms themselves, as men of power shifted their allegiance strategically in order to optimize local, familial, or personal power. A king could never be certain that his realm or rule would remain intact, or that his son might eventually inherit the throne upon his death.

It is in this strikingly volatile and unpredictable political climate that the stories of the royal dynasty known as the *knytlingar* – ‘Knudlings’ – and of St Knud Lavard (d. 1131) in particular must be understood. Valdemar was by no means the first or last Danish monarch to see the value in officially recognizing the sanctity of an ancestor. His family traced its lineage back to King Harald Bluetooth (r. 940–85) who accepted baptism sometime around 965, apparently to secure productive relations with his southern neighbours (DuBois 1999, 178). In the late tenth century, Harald reburied his father King Gorm’s remains in a church at Jelling, and erected a monument that credits himself with the conversion of Denmark (DuBois 1999, 82–3). His grandson King Knud (Cnut) the Great (r. 1018–35), son of Svend Forkbeard (r. 986–1014), accepted baptism before the start of his reign and married Emma, widow of King Ethelred of England. Together Knud and Emma used Christianity cannily as a political device, donating generously to various monasteries in England and assisting in the veneration of a number of English saints (DuBois 1999, 164). One of these, St Ælfheah, had served in life as the archbishop of

Canterbury, and had been martyred in 1011 by the troops of Knud's rival in England and Norway, King St Olaf (r. 995–1030; DuBois 1999, 34). King St Olaf's son, the Norwegian king Magnus the Good, also a candidate for sainthood, would eventually displace the Knudlings from their control of Denmark for a short while (1042–7). But soon the Knudlings retook the throne through the person of King Svend Estridsen, a nephew of Knud the Great, who ruled for the next twenty-seven years (1047–74). Five of Svend's thirteen sons each ruled in turn thereafter; King St Knud (r. 1080–6) was the second of these. Knud's English ambitions and heavy taxes enraged landowners of the realm, and together with Knud's brother Olaf, they mounted an insurrection that forced the king to flee. He was murdered while taking refuge in the church of St Albani in Odense, and his brother Olaf (nicknamed 'Hunger') assumed the throne for a brief period thereafter (r. 1086–95). Olaf's successor, his brother King Erik Ejegod ('Ever Good'; r. 1095–1103) was instrumental in obtaining Knud's canonization, representing his murdered brother as a martyr for the faith. Erik's own decision to leave his kingdom on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (he died in Cyprus in 1104), probably did much to guarantee his image as a holy and well-liked monarch in posterity. Erik was father to St Knud Lavard, whose son Valdemar eventually became king (1157–82). Knud himself, however, was bypassed by the crown, as the throne passed after Erik's death to his brother (Niels, r. 1104–34). It was Niels's conniving son Magnus (Mogens) who, perhaps in collusion with his father, planned and carried out the murder of Knud. In winning the canonization of his father, Valdemar reminded his realm of the machinations of Prince Magnus, the father of Valdemar's immediate predecessor on the throne, King Knud Magnussen (r. 1146–57). King Valdemar's successful suit for Knud's canonization underscored his inheritance of the holy characteristics of the Knudlings, and paved the way for similar imagery in the rule of his sons King Knud (r. 1182–1202) and King Valdemar Sejr (r. 1202–41).

The Rise of St Knud Lavard's Cult

What we know of Knud Lavard comes to us through the lenses of royal saga and clerical hagiography. One of the accounts closest to the event in time appears in the Roskilde Chronicle (*Chronicon Roskildense*), the original portion of which relates the history of Denmark from the era

of Christianization until 1157, the time of King Valdemar I's ascent to the throne. Here, before Valdemar's campaign for his father's canonization had borne fruit and in the aftermath of a regime predisposed to take Magnus's side, the chronicler treads a careful line between what appear to be contending views of Knud and his death. Introducing Niels after the reported death of King Erik, the chronicler writes:

Hearing of his death, the Danes conferred the rule upon Niels, a man of mildness and simplicity, adverse to control. In his day, great persecution of clerics and the people occurred. (*Chronicon Roskildense* 25)¹

The critical tone of this statement is muted: Niels is credited with good qualities, a surfeit of which, however, has rendered him ineffective as a protector of his realm. This view of the king, skewed more towards the negative, would be expanded in the later account of Saxo. The persecution of clerics referred to here consisted of pressures on the church by Danish lords, aggression staved off only through the effective offices of Bishop Peter, Magnus's former chaplain, and apparently his friend. Equally balanced is the chronicler's terse description of Magnus's murder of his cousin:

Magnus, the only son of King Niels, was urged by the devil and, feigning peace, murdered Knud, the son of King Erik, a man of modesty, sobriety, wisdom, and eloquence, adorned with every good manner, in the year of Our Lord 1130. (*Chronicon Roskildense* 25)

Magnus's act is credited to the devil, but little more attention is paid to him as an evil-doer. The chronicler praises the good qualities of the murdered Knud but makes no mention of any miracles or holy springs associated with his death, nor does he dwell in any way on the dispute about where the saint's body should be buried, elements of central importance to the later hagio-graphic accounts. Instead, the narrative turns immediately to the insurrection that results from the murder, a response for which the chronicler evinces little sympathy. In his view, Niels is still the rightful king, and Magnus his son, and thus, any act to dislodge them must be regarded with abhorrence as treason or sedition. Writing of the civil war that follows, he states:

Alas, the cruel year, the bitter day, the day of death, the day of darkness, filled with sorrows, burdened with sobbing! Alas the

day on which Magnus was struck down, the flower of Denmark laid low. That most handsome youth, mighty of strength, giver of cheer, lover of wisdom and constancy, Magnus was struck down, and with him two lords and five bishops ... (*Chronicon Roskildense* 29)

Such a lament indicates little enduring stigma upon Magnus for his earlier act of violence, which after all, was not without counterpart in Danish history of the day.

The chronicler Helmold of Bosau, writing for the canons of Lübeck sometime before 1172, also examines the events surrounding Knud's death in his *Chronicon slavorum* (chapters 48–51). His views are of interest in that they reflect the understandings of churchmen living in the area that Knud ruled during his career. To the south and east of Slesvig lay lands that had once been settled by Germanic-speaking populations but that had become primarily Slavic from the seventh century on. These Slavic-speaking communities, known in general as Wends, Obodrites, Wagrians (Waigri), and Polabians, had been first exposed to Christianity in the tenth century, but retained their pre-Christian religions to varying degrees for the next two centuries, in part as a form of resistance to the rule of the dukes of Saxony. The Obodrite prince St Gottschalk (d. 1066) lived as a Christian for part of his life and served as a mercenary to Danish kings. His son King Henry was also baptized, and made modest efforts to Christianize his realm, assisting the missionary monk St Vicelin (c. 1086–1154) to build a church at Lübeck in 1126.

According to Helmold, Knud – initially duke of Slesvig – became king of the Obodrites through a payment and vow of allegiance to Emperor Lothair II (r. 1125–37) when King Henry died in 1126. Knud soon came in conflict, however, with the late king's nephew Pribislaw (Przybyslaw), also a pretender to the throne. With bases in Slesvig and the lands of the Obodrites, Knud was able to conquer and subdue Holsten, as well as the districts controlled by the Wagrians and Polabians. He imprisoned his rivals Pribislaw and Niklot, and released them only after they had paid a ransom. He seems to have assisted St Vicelin in his work, although Helmold – who had lived at the monastery at Lübeck under Vicelin's abbotship – makes no mention of this assistance.

Of Knud's death, Helmold notes that his conflicts arose out of Knud's ambitions and King Niels's deference to him as a valued duke and neighbouring king. Watching a formal demonstration of friendship between Niels and Knud, a disgruntled Queen Margareta warns her son Magnus:

Look upon your kinsman: he holds a sceptre and acts as if he were also a king. How can he take on the title of king while your father still lives? If you put up with this and do not beat him to it, he will certainly rob you one day of both throne and life. (*Chronicon Slavorum* 1964, 319)

Egged on by his mother, Magnus plans an ambush. Knud, warned by his wife that he should not attend the meeting, disregards her premonitory dream and sets off without hesitation. Magnus greets his rival cousin with a kiss – a detail with biblical overtones that recur in all later accounts – and soon satisfies his fury through murder. Pribislaw and Niklot take control of the kingdom after Knud's death, dividing rulership between themselves. They each remained in power until the 1140s, after which the fortunes of the Wends began to decline. By the time Helmold wrote his chronicle, the region had become Germanicized again through a process of resettlement and acculturation, and was now thoroughly and permanently Christian. In this telling, then, Knud represents a real threat to King Niels's sovereignty, although Helmold blames the perception of this fact and resultant assassination of the duke upon a conniving Queen Margareta.

History belongs to the victor, however, and after the rise of Knud's son to the throne of Denmark, the received memory of his father's death became viewed as more clearly a case of martyrdom. Saxo Grammaticus provides an elaborate and elegant recounting of Knud's career and death in his *Gesta Danorum*, produced between 1190 and 1208, some two decades after Knud's canonization. Saxo, a canon of the Cathedral of Lund, was a personal secretary to Bishop Absalon, Valdemar's foster father and the Danish cleric most responsible for Knud's successful canonization. His chronicle was dedicated to Absalon's successor, Bishop Absalon Sunesøn, as well as to the newly crowned King Valdemar Sejr.

Book XIII of the *Gesta* focuses on Knud's life. It begins, as in the Roskilde Chronicle, with a mixed review of Niels's personality: modest and retiring, he is a virtuous man but a poor ruler. His wife Margareta, on the other hand, is depicted as notably active as a queen, sometimes to a fault. Her attempts to insure the good will of all for her son Magnus end up creating as much ill will as they seek to avoid, as the tangle of marriages she organizes divides the sympathies and allegiance of the royal houses of Denmark and Sweden. Of Magnus, Saxo allows the prince's misdeeds to do the work of characterization. He writes: 'Magnus grew up well-endowed but ill-fated, for he committed a most loathsome murder on a kinsman, and developed

into a most notorious exemplar of treachery' (*Gesta Danorum*, 108). His primary treacherous act, of course, is Knud's murder, and for Saxo – in contrast with earlier chroniclers – this crime overshadows all other acts in the prince's life.

Saxo's account traces the military and political careers of Niels, Magnus, and Knud. When Magnus and his supporters evince envy towards Knud, Queen Margareta intervenes, trying to insure good relations between the cousins. Knud swears a solemn vow of loyalty to Magnus. Yet after Margareta's death, Magnus again proves ill disposed to Knud, and his supporters spread rumours of Knud's desire to usurp the throne of Denmark. Niels confronts Knud on these charges, but Knud defends himself admirably, citing his many acts of loyalty and assistance to the king.

The king relents again, as least in public. Secretly, though, he permits his son to plan Knud's assassination. Magnus assembles a group of allies and plans his ambush carefully. He feigns an oath of friendship with his cousin so as to throw off any suspicion. Knud's wife gets wind of the plan and tries to warn her husband, but Knud refuses to listen to her allegations. Knud goes to Roskilde to celebrate Christmas with Niels and Magnus. He is lured into a nearby forest by a Saxon minstrel who, wishing to warn Knud of the ambush while not breaking his vow of secrecy with Magnus, hints at the coming disaster by singing 'in a noble song the treachery of Grimilda towards her brothers,' a narrative element present in some form already in Robert of Ely's *vita* (*Gesta Danorum*, 312). Knud, however, refuses to take the hint. The meeting between Knud and his slayer ends as follows:

Then the men in ambush began to raise a shout, and Knud looked round about and asked what this band of warriors wanted with him. Magnus answered that they would now discuss the succession of the crown and who was to wear it. Knud then expressed a wish that his royal father should long remain at the helm with good fortune and a prosperous gale, but said that this was not the time to bring such matters forward. As he said this, Magnus started up and caught him by the hair like a brawler. Now his treachery was apparent, and Knud put his hand to the hilt of his sword and tried to get it out of the scabbard; but when he had half unsheathed the sword, Magnus killed him by splitting his head open. The rest of the conspirators stabbed the fallen man again and again with their spears. His blood flowed into the earth and supplies a health-giving spring of water for the use of mankind for ever. (*Gesta Danorum* 1980, 128)

After the death, Niels refuses to allow Knud to be buried at Roskilde,

and his supporters have to make due with the more meagre church at Ringsted instead. On the way to that site, the bearers put the body down for a time on a site that also becomes a healing spring. The death engenders outrage and sorrow by all and soon ignites a civil war.

In the somewhat later medieval chronicle of the Knudlings, *Knýtlinga saga* (chapters 78–124) – a work that drew on earlier written sources but also possibly the testimony of King Valdemar Sejð – Knud's secular and sacred life is recounted with slightly different details. Knud's father, King Erik, seized Knud's mother, the Lady Bothilde (Bodil), who, according to the saga, is sister of Emperor Henry V (r. 1106–25) and wife of King Bjørn of the Wends. Bothilde is apparently an unwilling captive, and after bearing Erik a son, she eventually is allowed to return home to her brother. Her young son, however – Knud – remains behind in Denmark, destined, as Erik foresees, to become a great credit to his kinsmen there. Such, of course, is narrative fancy; Bothilde was the daughter of Thorgaut Ulfsson Fagrskinna, and she accompanied her husband Erik on his final pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Yet these details in the saga set up Knud as a man with impressive familial connections on both sides, making him appear more of a threat to his uncle and cousin.

In chapter 79 of the saga, Erik prepares to end his reign and life by taking a pilgrimage to Byzantium. He bequeaths the duchy of Slesvig, including the prosperous market town of Hedeby, to his son Knud, while relinquishing the rest of his realm to his brother Niels. Neither Niels nor his son Magnus care much for their young kinsman Knud, who grows up into a generous and well-liked man. In chapter 85 of the saga, Knud pays a visit to his powerful uncle, Emperor Henry, and receives good advice on how to generate income for himself and thereby support his habitual generosity, which has largely depleted his fortune. By charging a docking fee in the harbour of Hedeby, Knud will be able to recover his economic viability while injuring his popularity very little. In chapter 87, Knud forces conversion upon a pagan from the eastern Baltic, Vidgaut, and in the following chapter, Vidgaut successfully negotiates Knud's marriage to the daughter of the king of Novgorod. Gift exchanges with his cousin, the new Emperor Henry, as well as excellent relations with the powers to the east of Denmark, spell trouble for Knud, as he now begins to appear as a major threat to the rule of his less popular uncle King Niels and cousin Magnus.

An honest liegeman, Knud dutifully treats his uncle and cousin to a feast in chapter 91, an act of hospitality that is to be requited through a similar feast given by Niels at Christmas time. In chapter 92, Knud spends the holiday with his kinsmen at Ringsted, but is lured by

Magnus thereafter into a forest, where, along with his drunken men, Knud is overpowered and murdered. His death occurs the day after the Feast of the Epiphany (6 January), the end of the Christmas peace.

As might be expected, the ecclesiastical versions of Knud's life emphasize more the spiritual aspects of the holy duke. Two *vitae* were produced in preparation for Knud's canonization: the first, now lost but for some fragments, appeared at the behest of Knud's brother Erik Emune, authored by an English monk at Ringsted, Robert of Ely (Chesnutt 2003, 5). It was probably the earliest textual account, dating to prior 1137. A second, more compact *vita* appeared somewhat later, probably at the time of Knud's translation, and became a source for Saxo's account along with Robert's earlier work (*Gesta Danorum*, 289–90). The later *vita* served as the source for the liturgies for Knud's January and June feasts, and these, in turn, for the broad details of the ballads and the play *Ludus de sancto Kanuto duce*, discussed below.

In the hagiographic accounts, Knud is depicted as pious and loving, walking into the ambush that takes his life without the slightest suspicion of his despicable cousin. The Mass proper for the feast of Knud's Passion, 7 January, is lavish in its praise for the saint and condemnation of his enemies. Breaking down the narrative of Knud's life into eight *lectiones*, readings to be delivered in the course of Knud's feast, the liturgy encapsulates the major claims to sainthood that had been advanced in Knud's favour and recognized by papal authorities. They are followed by a further four readings that tie the narrated events to biblical precepts and quotations. Twelve readings on the feast of the Translation (25 June) take up the story of his burial and subsequent miracles, albeit in far less detail.

The readings of the 7 January feast open with the departure of King Erik Ejegod and Queen Bothilde (Bodil) on their planned pilgrimage. He has ruled the realm with singular effectiveness, and the populace is sorrowful to see him depart. Leaving his son Harald as his regent, he fosters Knud with the mighty noble Skjalm. At Rome he receives a pallium for the country's bishop and sends the vestment home, proceeding himself towards the Holy Land. When he dies at Cyprus, his grave becomes the beginning of a new and very effective cemetery. As the feast's first response intones, 'Duke Knud was born of a noble lineage; King Erik was progenitor of the line from which the salvation of the realm and the liberty of the people sprang' (Chesnutt 2003, 145). In the second reading, the Danes respond to Erik's death by relieving Harald of his office (he has proved unsatisfactory in the meantime) and elect Niels instead. Here the readings explicitly criticize Niels's judgment and point out the resulting (unnatural)

prominence of Queen Margareta:

But because Niels possessed less foresight and leadership than the kingship required, most of the responsibility of government devolved on the noble Queen Margareta, so that it was said in other countries that Denmark was ruled by the might of a woman. (Chesnutt 2003, 146)

Margareta is not faulted for her husband's failing, however, and is credited with wisdom as well as love for her nephew Knud. She promotes good relations between Knud and Magnus, and extracts from Knud the oath of loyalty which Knud will honour in his death: 'As God is my witness, nothing harmful shall befall him [Magnus] on my account but I shall be, as I am obliged, a faithful brother to him in all things.' The explicit fraternal references of the quotation, along with Knud's address of Margareta as 'dearest mother,' help establish an imagistic parallel with the biblical Cain and Abel and the coming fratricide that will cut short Knud's earthly life. Knud subsequently requests and receives from King Niels the vacant title of Duke of Slesvig, assuming along with it responsibility for a region ceaselessly harried by Wends and thieves.

In the third reading, we see Knud as an active adult, girding himself for battle. He rids his duchy of foreign attacks and local strife, so that the populace can at last live in peace and prosperity. He confronts and hangs a kinsman who has despised the law, despite the latter's appeal to kinship preference. Knud encodes the moral lesson of the primacy of justice in his speech of condemnation: 'Just because you are so nearly related to me, you shall be raised up higher than others in your punishment. For, to the very same degree that you rank above others, so much higher shall you be hanged than them!' (Chesnutt 2003, 146). Using a ship's mast and a high hill, Knud carries out his word.

In the feast's fourth reading, Knud subjects the once-antagonistic Wends to Danish dominance. Where others had feared to tread, Knud strides confidently. He is welcomed by the people, and 'by general assent that territory was committed to his government' (Chesnutt 2003, 147). Just, prudent, and pious, the exemplary Knud awakens quite the opposite behaviours in his cousin Magnus: 'The king's son Magnus, utterly blinded with jealousy, conceived resentment in his heart and gave birth to wickedness; he desired guilefully to wipe the duke off the face of the earth but could not because his time had not yet come' (Chesnutt 2003, 148). Again, biblical parallels, this time with Christ's Passion, are drawn, while false witnesses accuse Knud of wrongs against the king.

In the fifth reading, Knud makes an eloquent and fervent self-

defence. The king, 'who was a guileless man and easily swayed' (Chesnutt 2003, 148) dismisses the charges against his nephew and invites him instead to spend Christmas with the royal court at Roskilde. Knud's wife tries to dissuade Knud from attending, but he refuses to heed her advice.

In the sixth reading, the conniving Magnus plans his ambush, drawing allies into his plot. His brother Erik Skadelår, and nobles Ubbe, Håkon the Norwegian, and Håkon of Skåne all pledge to assist him in his plan. Håkon of Skåne eventually withdraws from the conspiracy, but the others remain committed to their intention as Magnus approaches Knud with false plans of a forthcoming pilgrimage and outward shows of devotion and loyalty, quoted at length in the reading. Knud responds by cheerfully agreeing to meet Magnus elsewhere.

In the seventh reading, Magnus sets his ambush on the day after Epiphany: 'At length, arriving in the forest where he had decided (to his eternal damnation) to perpetrate the murder of his kinsman, the author of the crime concealed his armed band in the thickness of the trees and, walking back and forth alone in the forest, dispatched a messenger of deceit to the duke, telling him to fulfill without delay the faithful promise he had given' (Chesnutt 2003, 150). Knud is again warned not to go by his sister Cecilia, but he refuses to hear this warning as well. Likewise, he refuses his retinue's urging that he carry a sword or bring a guard with him. As in other versions, Magnus's messenger tries to warn Knud of the impending danger through song, but again, the holy duke dismisses the warning.

In the eighth and culminating reading, Magnus is portrayed as an unmistakable villain, and the biblical parallels between this royal assassination and Christ's Passion are explicitly drawn:

Hastening to the site of his betrayal, the saint saw the traitor walking alone in the forest awaiting him. Having seen him he dismounted, handed his horse to his own attendant and, continuing by himself, approached his hostile kinsman with a cheerful countenance, a pure conscience, and a faithful mind. Magnus came closer. Magnus, 'the great one,' was his name, I tell you; great he was in his heart's malice, great in his mouth's falsehood, great in the impiousness of his deed! He greeted the faithful, kind, and just man with his foul tongue, embraced him with his profane arms, and earned with a kiss of peace the guilt of the traitor Judas's crime. (Chesnutt 2003, 151)

The author's rhetorical flourishes rely upon the medieval image of Christ as a prince and his apostles as his liegemen, an image that

would have been all the more redolent in the minds of a listening audience having just celebrated the baptism of Christ the day before Knud's feast.

Magnus continues to deceive his cousin through guileful answers to his various queries: 'He calls him a brother whom he treacherously assails; he urges him to walk whom he desires shall fall; and he asks him to sit against whom he presumes to rise up!' (Chesnutt 2003, 151). Knud notices Magnus's armour and asks about its purpose. Magnus says it is 'to pay back one who is my enemy according to his deserts' (Chesnutt 2003, 151). Knud tries to restrain him from committing violence in this holy season, and pledges his own help against any who may have wronged the prince. At last the writer declares: 'Now the crime could be concealed no longer. Magnus enveloped the duke in words of hatred, saying: "Knud, whose is Denmark?"' (Chesnutt 2003, 151). Knud's fervent avowal of fealty to King Niels and his son is brushed aside as Magnus vents his frustrations at his cousin's greater popularity and likely eventual preeminence. As Knud makes a final denial of all wrongdoing and consigns his case to God, Magnus and his men attack, brutally murdering the duke.

The Feast of the Epiphany in the Western church combines the narrative of the visitation by the Magi (Mt 2:1–12, celebrated on 6 January) – conceived of in medieval imagination as kings from afar – with the revelation of Christ's divinity at his baptism (Mt 3:16–17, Mk 1:10–11, Lk 3:21–2, Jn 1:32–4; celebrated on the following Sunday), in which God declares from the heavens that Jesus is his beloved and pleasing son. These two narrative events are echoed in the January 7 readings for the Feast of St Knud through the opening image of King Erik leaving on pilgrimage, and this closing image of Knud's betrayal. At the outset, we see the noble and exemplary acts of a monarch through Erik's willing acknowledgment of the primacy of God: embodied, as for the Three Kings, in the act of pilgrimage. In this eighth reading, the ultimate sanctity of Knud is manifested at last: the mask of deception falls, Magnus is revealed to the world in his evil-doings, and, more important, Knud is revealed in his eternal good:

And thus, by a glorious martyrdom the just man paid the due price of the flesh. So he suffered death, that pious, upright, and innocent man, Duke Knud of Denmark, offspring of King Erik and father of the venerable King Valdemar, on the seventh day before the Ides of January, the day after Epiphany, a Wednesday in the eleven hundred and thirtieth year after the incarnation of Our Lord, to whom be honor and glory throughout endless ages! Amen. (Chesnutt 2003, 152)

The narrative Knud who defends the holiness of the season against unwar-ranted violence is paralleled by the timely Feast of Knud that returns the faithful from the revelry of Christmas peace to the reality of a workaday sinful and violent world. The remaining readings of the feast tie Knud to the parable image of good grain planted in proper ground (Mt 13:3–8), an image in turn applied to Christ, who triumphs as a bountiful harvest despite the iniquities of the world. It is this unabashedly religious narrative that is recalled in the two translated ballads below and dramatized in the *Ludus de Sancto Kanuto Duce*, underscoring without quibbling the holiness of the blessed martyr and his importance for the nation of Denmark.

The Ballads of St Knud Lavard

Two ballads survive as musical renditions of the events described above, particularly as recounted in Saxo's text and the liturgical lessons. The first of these, reproduced as the first item in the translation section at the end of this chapter, focuses attention on the events leading up to Knud's assassination in particular. Recorded in the sixteenth-century Royal Library manuscript GKS 2397 4to, (the 'Rentzell Manuscript') and partly emended by Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616) sometime before 1591, the ballad stands alongside other legendary ballads at the very end of the manuscript ('Sankte Knud,' vol. 2, 8–11). It was sung to the tune of the Latin Christmas carol *Dies est laetitiae*, a song which found its way into German translation in Klug's 1533 Wittenberg hymn-book, and from there into Danish translation as well (Friis 1945, 511). The ballad's ten-line stanzaic form and characteristic rhyme scheme (ABABCCDEED) matches precisely with the Latin original as well as other Danish and German hymns sung to this ancient melody. Based on Klug's 1533 melody,² the ballad's sung version can be reconstructed as shown above.

Ballad of St Knud Lavard

Tenor

Skjönt at que - de om sanc - te Knud, Gud gif - fœ oss ther
 We now re - joice of St. Knud to tell, God grant us grace to

thill naa - de; w - di Sles - uig vor handen her - tug prud, thet land tha mon - ne
 do so In Sles - vig did the good duke dwell He ruled o - ver both

hand raad - de; wret - ws - kell tha lag - de hand neder Dan - mark fick for her -
 high and low, The un - just, e - vil he put down For Den - mark thus he

tu - gen heder, thet ri - get kom - me till from - me skal - cke oc tif - fœ
 earned re - nown: the realm did from that sure - ly gain All vil - lains, thieves he

dreff hand wdt, then go - de her - tug, sanc - te Knud, med si - ne ret - ui -
 drove a - way, that good duke Knud did in his day, with his jus - tice wise

se dom - me.
 and plain.

In the first stanza, Knud is succinctly praised for his able leadership of Slesvig, conduct that earns renown for the entirety of Denmark, rides the realm of villains and brigands, and evinces Knud's singular sense of justice. The ballad's second stanza summarizes the complex motivations of Magnus with the simple statement: 'Magnus in his falsity would have no equal in the land.' He invites Knud to meet him in the forest outside Harrested (Haraldssted), an invitation which Knud accepts with characteristic innocence and goodwill. In the third stanza, Knud brushes aside the warnings of his retainers, while the fourth stanza recounts a miraculous portent recounted only in Robert of Ely's *vita* (Chesnutt 2003, 75). On the eve of Knud's martyrdom, Robert reports, a light appeared above Ringsted so bright that people believed there was a fire. This light is alluded to in the stanza, where it is explained as a mark of God's will to allow the martyrdom to occur, for the eternal good of all thereafter.

The following stanza then picks up on the motif of the warning in song, depicted with characteristic economy. The messenger's song becomes here a blatant warning with little of the subtlety described in either Saxo or the liturgical accounts. Yet Knud continues to miss the point, due to his lauded constitutional inability to sense or fear betrayal.

The next stanza picks up on the Judas imagery of the liturgical accounts, describing Knud as a lamb (again, a parallel with Christ as the sacrificial lamb) and Magnus, by extension, as a ravenous wolf.

The subsequent stanza boils down the altercation between Knud and Magnus to Magnus's key question 'Knud, who does Denmark now belong to?' – a line derived directly from the liturgical text's 'Kanute, cuius est Dacia?' (Chesnutt 2003, 74). Knud's eloquent self-defence is summarized in a following stanza, which in turn leads to the abrupt and violent attack of Magnus, depicted with typically balladic brutality.

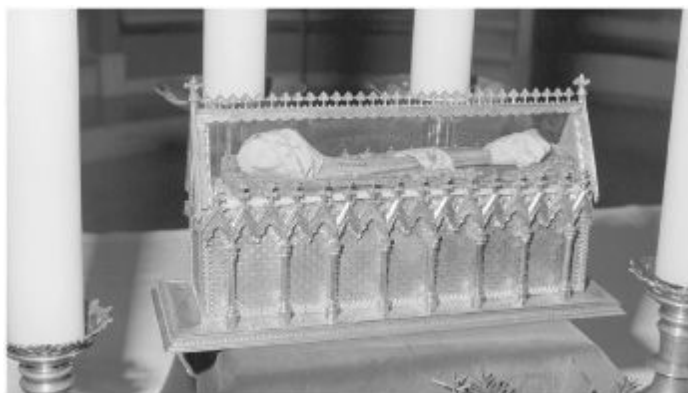
The violent death segues seamlessly into the bubbling forth of a healing spring at the place where Knud's blood poured out, while a final stanza declares Knud's present existence in heaven. In essence, then, this ballad encapsulates the high points of Knud's *vita* as it was presented standardly on his January feast, with the addition of key miracles that would have been important to devotees and petitioners. In his marginal notes on the Rentzell Manuscript, Vedel includes two additional stanzas, which he states were typically sung with the ballad. These praise both King St Knud and St Knud Lavard and depict both as spiritual resources for Denmark. Along with these stanzas, the ballad thus represents an efficient and effective means of summarizing the saint's life for a lay or folk audience. Yet its specific content, and close echoing of the liturgical text, probably indicates a learned, perhaps clerical author.

In his seminal ballad collection of 1591, Vedel declines to print the medieval ballad as he knew it from the Rentzell Manuscript, offering instead his own version. Friis (1945, 511) posits that Vedel may have found the earlier ballad too historically inaccurate, noting that the editor drew on his own translation of Saxo in creating the new version. Dahlerup (1998, 2:156) notes that Vedel's emendations tend to historicize, moralize, and stylistically refine. Undoubtedly, these emendations were also intended to correct the spiritual errors of the earlier Catholic song, bringing it in line with Lutheran theology.

Vedel's ballad opens like its predecessor with a stirring call to song and words of praise for the duke's just judgments. In stanza 4, Magnus is again described as not wanting to share equal status with his cousin. From there, the ballad describes the fateful meeting and final parley, avoiding the reference to the miraculous night-time light. Gone as well is any reference to the messenger or his song of warning. The murder is followed by details of its aftermath, including the role of Bishop Ser (Saxo's Archbishop Ascerus) in calming the raging crowds after the murder. It is Ascerus who judges the criminality of Magnus's act and negotiates his eventual exile to Gotland, where he was also king. These details are drawn directly from Saxo (*Gesta Danorum* Book XIII, 129–32). Vedel's ballad demonstrates the continued value placed upon national saints in post-Reformation Scandinavia, albeit with theological and devotional changes.

The *Ludus* Text and Liturgical Drama

The play entitled *Ludus de sancto Kanuto duce* ('A Play of Duke St Knud') is one of the few concrete pieces of evidence for the tradition of liturgical drama in Scandinavia. Although it is likely that liturgical drama was popular in the region, as it was in the rest of Europe, only a handful of texts have survived to the present day. Few other sources of evidence, such as play lists, records of guild or city expenditures, or other contemporary accounts exist to substantiate the workings of the tradition in the region as they do in England, France, or other parts of the continent. Other surviving Nordic texts include the Danish *Dorotheae Komodie*, an early sixteenth-century translation of a Latin drama of the martyrdom of St Dorothy (Billekov-Jansen 1944, 56–7; Dahlherup 1998, 2:410–7), and the short Marian miracle play *De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratiam*, written in Swedish prior to 1492 (Wright 1993, 4; Klemming 1863–79, 1–6). A dramatic adaptation of the Book of Tobit exists as well, dating from the year 1550 (Klemming 1863–79, 7–8). Of these works, the *Ludus* is the only text that treats a native Nordic saint and that can be assuredly credited



1 Reliquary containing the arm bone of St Ansgar. The Neogothic shrine dates from 1865 and is housed at the Kleiner Michel church in Hamburg, Germany. Photo courtesy Lars Reumann, Archiv St. Ansgar.



2 Wooden statue of St Henrik enclosed in case, fifteenth century. Casings protected sculptures and allowed them to be closed from view during Lent. Nousiainen, Finland. Photo courtesy Markus Hiekkänen.



3 Altarpiece from Austevoll Church, Norway, depicting St Sunniva. Dated c. 1520. Photo courtesy Ann Mari Olsen-Bergen Museum.



4 Wooden statue of St Olaf, fifteenth century. The figure probably originally included Olaf's attributes: an ax and royal orb. Skelleftea Church, Sweden. Photo by Tom DuBois.



5 Relics of St Magnus, recovered in the early twentieth century during renovations of the Cathedral of St Magnus, Orkney. Photo courtesy Orkney Heritage.



6 Fresco rendering of St Knud Lavard, completed in the 1520s. Ceiling of Skive Church, Denmark. Knud is depicted with a sword and a version of the Danish flag *Dannebrog*. He is seated in a flower, connoting youth. Photo courtesy Bodil and Ingvar Glad.



7 Wooden statue of St Eric, fifteenth century. Eric is depicted crowned and in armour and probably originally carried a sword and orb. Skellefteå Church, Sweden. Photo by Tom DuBois.



8 Embroidered altar cloth depicting St Þorlákr, sixteenth century. Holar Cathedral, Iceland. Photo courtesy National Museum of Iceland.



9 Painted rendering of St Katarina with her mother, St Birgitta. Birgitta is depicted with her book of revelations, Katarina with a deer, cup, and flower. Sixteenth century. Hogsby Church, Sweden. Photo courtesy Lennart Karlsson.



10 Woodcut depicting Sts Hendrek and Cunegunde. *Passionael*, printed in Lübeck, 1492. Photo courtesy Royal Library of Denmark.



11 Wooden statue depicting Madonna and Child, fourteenth century. Skriða closter. Photo courtesy National Museum of Iceland.

to a Nordic author. It survives in nearly complete form in a single manuscript in the Danish Royal Library in Copenhagen, MS Thott 1409 4to, written down by a man named Wilhelmus Erasmides Horsnetianus – Villum Rasmussen of Horsnæs – sometime prior to 1574 (Chesnutt 2003, 70). We have no way of knowing when exactly the play was composed, but its details – particularly positive references to the pope, pilgrimage, Knud's prayer to the Virgin, and the custom of drinking a toast to St Gertrude – suggest a date prior to the arrival of the Danish Reformation (1536). Also noteworthy is the absence of any overt imposition of Lutheran ideology, which might be expected of a work concerning a Catholic saint authored in the decades following the rise of Danish state Lutheranism (*Ludus de*

Sancto Kanuto Duce: Et fædrelandshistorisk Skuespil, xxxvi). On the other hand, in comparison with many saints' plays written and performed in medieval Europe, the narrative and apparatus of the *Ludus* is quite secular and non-supernatural, perhaps implying a shift in the presentation or perception of St Knud from valued intercessor on a supernatural plane to emulative role model in human life (Dahlerup 1998, 1:409). The following discussion contextualizes the *Ludus* within a broader European tradition of liturgically related drama, and points out some of the most striking features of this important literary document. Like the ballads discussed above, the *Ludus* was almost certainly the creation of a learned mind, one closely familiar with the liturgy of Knud's January feast. Yet at the same time, like the ballads, it was intended for a broader audience: in it, Knud is depicted as a hero of the people, a saint for Denmark.

The dramatization of liturgical narrative was undoubtedly one of the most memorable and beloved aspects of medieval popular piety. Whereas the stories of the Old and New Testament, as well as the testimony of the saints, found verbal enunciation through the liturgical calendar and visual representation through religious art, it was in drama that these events took on a concreteness and sensory richness that could be scarcely equalled otherwise. *Ludi* (plays) bridged the oppositions of the sacred and the profane, clergy and laity, truth and fabrication, seriousness and frivolity. Performed in groups at certain seasons – for example, Christmas, Candlemas, Holy Week, Easter time – or singly throughout the liturgical year in conjunction with given saints' feasts, these plays gave body and colour to the holy teachings of the church. They drew performers as well as audiences into a collective imaginative contemplation of sacred narrative, embodied and enacted by members of the living community itself. Not surprisingly, then, clergy actively encouraged such dramas, and the *Diarium Vadstenense* declares in passing that the translation of St Katarina in 1489 was celebrated in part by a dramatization of her life, apparently commissioned by the monastery of Vadstena itself (*Diarium Vadstenense*, item 884, part 12; 372–3). Muir (1986, 114–15) notes a similar practice in connection with the cult of St Anthony in Bas-Dauphiné at about this same time: a play, written in local Provençal in the opening years of the sixteenth century, was regularly performed in honour of the ancient saint and warmly supported by the Anthonine Order, founded in the province. It is likely that the *Ludus de sancto Kanuto duce* was meant to perform a similar didactic and celebratory function and may well have been promoted – if not also commissioned or authored – by the clergy of the Benedictine monastery at Ringsted, the site of Knud's shrine (Dahlerup 1998, 1:403). The spiritual benefits of such performances could at times be

quantified for the faithful through the award of indulgences for viewing the plays (Linke 1993, 26), although no records exist for indulgences having been associated with Knud's play.

St Knud was a favourite of merchants and townsmen, and these may have played roles in the dramatization of his life. After his canonization in 1170, some thirty Danish guilds named Knud as their patron (Brask et al. 1984, 2:199–205). One or more of these may have assumed the responsibility for manning, planning, and financing the play, as was customary among guilds throughout Europe. As Harris (1992, 122) points out in his discussion of liturgical drama in France, this guild context could exert a shaping influence over the play as written and realized.

While biblical themes were favourite subjects of liturgical drama throughout Europe, plays about non-biblical saints were more common in the south than in the north. Muir (1986, 126) notes the tremendous abundance of such plays in France, Spain, and Italy, but the relative paucity elsewhere. England possesses only three such plays, and Germany only somewhat more. The drama of St Knud resembles the pattern of the French plays of St Geneviève (patron saint of Paris) and of St Joan of Arc, the latter memorialized in *Le Mystère du Siège d'Orléans* composed sometime in the early 1430s, possibly even before the saint's death (1431; Muir 1986, 133–6). The *Ludus de sancto Kanuto Duce* shares this unabashedly local and patriotic tone.

The Structure of the Play

Medieval liturgical drama differs from other modes of memorializing beloved saints (the *vita*, the oral sermon, the ballad); it also differs substantively from what we think of as drama today. In fact, as any examination of the *Ludus* demonstrates, it is essential to understand this genre of expression within its own formal norms and constraints. The liturgical drama offered a unique means of recalling, enacting, and celebrating the life of a saint whose intercession was sought by the participating community.

One of the most distinctive features of the liturgical drama is its tendency to use *décor simultané* (simultaneous staging). As Harris (1992, 51–2) explains in his overview of medieval theatre, this dramatic technique in some ways privileges space over acting, and involves the movement of the players between a central acting space and a series of more specialized raised sets arrayed in a ring or line behind or beside the lower staging area. In the Valenciennes mystery

plays of 1547, manuscript illustrations tell us that they were performed on a stage of some one hundred feet in length, raised at a height of four to five feet. Different ‘mansions’ on the platform rose above this stage, representing heaven, Nazareth, Pilate’s palace, a bishop’s residence, a boat (for dramatizing Christ’s miracles on the Sea of Galilee), a gaping mouth of hell, and a turret containing infernal tormentors and dragons (Harris 1992, 120). These settings could be lavish and tall and in England, at least, they could at times be mounted on wagons for transport to different groups of audiences, within the same city. In such productions, the movement of characters from one locus to the next provided the transition between scenes and helped constitute the narrative drive or progression of the plot. This technique was clearly employed in the *Ludus*, which preserves detailed indications of it in the Latin stage directions. In the play, we see the characters move between formal courts, each described as a raised *palatium*, and street scenes. While most of the important speeches occur in the *palatium* settings, much of the memorable action of the play occurs at street level.

A second uniquely medieval characteristic of liturgical drama, closely related to the above, is the importance of image and tableau as sources and parallels for the staging and execution of the play. As Sheingorn (1980) points out, modern scholars too quickly regard medieval drama as a primarily textual phenomenon when, in fact, aspects of staging, image, and sound undoubtedly played a part – if not at times even a greater role than the verbal text – in conveying the ideas or experiences of the play. The medieval audience knew St Knud Lavard from his visual depictions in church frescoes and other art, where he is standardly depicted as young, serene, and doughty. A depiction of the saint from the church at Skive, dated to 1522 (Broby-Johansen 1947, 129), shows Knud sitting in a decorative flower, an image reminiscent of a line in the earlier Knud ballad (‘You flowers of Denmark two’). He holds a broad sword aloft as well as a banner representing the Danish flag, a further mark of the Knudling dynasty. A coronet of round stones adorns his forehead, and his clothing appears rich. He is clearly young and vigorous. When an appropriately costumed actor mounted a stage that represented a castle or hall in Holsten or Roskilde, he became part of a *tableau vivant* intended to recall the iconographic representation while also encapsulating the entirety of that aspect of the saint’s life for the watching and listening audience.

A third essential aspect of the play’s formal construction – and one which medieval drama shares with the textual *vita* – is the tendency, as Linke (1993, 20) puts it, to demonstrate rather than develop the saint’s characteristics. The included narrative events are aimed

primarily at revealing the saint's holy qualities, qualities that the saint possessed as products of grace, and that eventually led to the saint's holy deeds and entry into heaven. The events of the plot are not stacked so as to demonstrate how a saint became holy or any such psychological development within the saint's mind. Rather, as we can see in the *Ludus*, Knud is good and righteous from beginning to end: he possesses a sense of duty and justice (demonstrated by his work to clean up the crime wave in Holsten), a sense of loyalty to his queen and king (demonstrated by his repeated acts of allegiance to them despite difficult circumstances), and a sense of trust (demonstrated by his simple refusal to believe ill of his cousin). Although a modern reader may wish (like Knud's wife) that the holy duke come to his senses regarding Magnus's perfidy, the medieval audience assembles to celebrate the fact that Knud was by grace incapable of doing so.

A fourth characteristic of the play is its attention to questions of class and sodality in its depiction of the events leading up to Knud's death. Where King St Knud could be said to have been killed by his subjects high and low, the plot against St Knud Lavard is limited to a small coterie of malcontents surrounding the evil Prince Magnus. The play makes a great effort to showcase and exculpate every other polity of Danish society, including townsmen of Roskilde, the farmers of Slesvig-Holsten, and the retainers of the royal court. Gender is also accorded attention: the raped townswoman and prominent speeches by Queen Margareta and Knud's wife demonstrate the importance of women as an intended audience for the play, even if the majority of the play's characters (and also actors) were male.³ The self-conscious attempt to include all components of Danish society within the play's narrative is apparent from the text.

A fifth and final characteristic of the play is its inclusion of a figure of lower class status who nonetheless appears to play an important role. Such *fou* or *villain* figures abound in medieval drama, enlivening plays, clarifying actions, and acting as a glue to link separate scenes together (Muir 1986, 153–6). In the *Ludus*, the herald Tyrne Hætte fills this role in memorable and entertaining manner, appearing at the outset of the play, during the

Tyrne Hette's Warning Song

Andante ♩ = 120

Tenor

Alt ver - den er fuld med falsk och suig, - sa - lig er
For red - del sse och falsk er mig till, - mitt bröd - ieg

then mand der woch - der sig vill; Der stan - der alt vag - de for huer mandz dör, saa
ic - ic ke suig - ge vill; Huo len - ge vill leff - ue och bliff - ue glædt, hand

vell - som nu ve - ret haff - uer för,
fa - rer ey ann - dre vey y stad.

harrowing of Holsten, and finally taking centre stage when he tries to surreptitiously warn the duke of the impending ambush (see above). Dahlerup (1998, 1:408) suggests that Tyrne Hætte's name implies that he may have worn a jester's hat and that he may have delivered the prologue and epilogue as well, making him very similar to fool characters in other medieval dramas. Given the character's overall positive role, it is not surprising that the play absolves him of further blame in Knud's death by explicitly depicting Magnus sending him away before Knud's murder:

Tyrne Hætte, go over there to one side,
This I wish to command you.
Of what we take counsel you may not know:
You shall not reveal our conversation.

(lines 1023–6)

The banishment of Tyrne Hætte here, along with the fleeing of the assassins from Denmark, helps shield the audience from any feelings of collective guilt or blame that this tale of royal murder might evoke.

Both the liturgical text for Knud's January feast and the play that may have been performed on that day underscore the logic of viewing the Feast of St Knud as the end of the Nordic celebration of Christmas. Defending the sanctity and peace of the season on the day after the Feast of the Epiphany, Knud, through his murder, nonetheless ushers in the return to the ordinary and profane. His blood marks the end of a season of peace and good will, underscored in the play's epilogue by the dark warnings of the end time:

All the world is now filled with treachery,
All will betray each other.
One is not faithful nor loyal to another,

Either among the poor or the rich.
Fathers spare not their own sons
Such is a great misery to hear of,
Nor can a daughter her mother, who does not understand
But would do her harm.

(1209–16)

The epilogue's description echoes the words of the Gospel of Matthew, in which Christ warns, 'Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against their parents and have them put to death' (10:21). For the late medieval Christian, such fearful times were constantly in evidence, no less so in a Denmark in which a royal prince had conspired to put his own faithful cousin to death. Violence had not abated in the centuries that followed; indeed, intermittent strife, particularly in Holsten and Slesvig, were endemic aspects of the Danish state. At the same time, however, the Danish audience could find comfort in the sanctity of St Knud Lavard, a noble duke whose death had made him a valued intercessor for his people. An exemplar of righteous living for prince, noble, or peasant to imitate, Knud Lavard was indeed a saint for Denmark.

The Manuscripts and Translations

The following selections are drawn from manuscripts produced soon after the start of the Danish Reformation. The first *Ballad of St Knud Lavard* is drawn from the Rentzell Manuscript (Royal Library GKS 2397 4to) as edited by Grüner Nielsen (1914) (*Ballad of St Knud Lavard*). The second *Ballad of St Knud Lavard* appeared in Anders Sørensen Vedel's 1591 *It hundrede uduualde Danske Viser* (Vedel 1591). The text of the *Ludus de sancto Kanuto duce* is as it appears in Kjær's edition of 1970 a partial reordering of Birket Smith's 1868 edition of the sixteenth-century Manuscript Thott 1409 4to. A newly published diplomatic edition of the play, produced by Stedstrup in 2005, was consulted in the final stages of the translation.

Ballad of St Knud Lavard (Rentzell Manuscript)

1. We now rejoice, of St Knud to tell,

God grant us grace to do so!
In Slesvig did the good duke dwell
He ruled over both high and low.
The unjust, evil, he put down
For Denmark thus he earned renown:
The realm did from that surely gain.
All villains, thieves he drove away,
That good Duke Knud did in his day,
With justice wise and plain.

2. Magnus in his falsity,
Would have no equal in the land.
His heart full of duplicity,
Against the duke he planned.
Magnus plotted the duke to cheat,
And bade him come and with him meet
Down there in Harrested glade.
Knud's heart was full of amity,
He did not sense Mogens' enmity,
And promised unafraid.

3. The night after Epiphany,
The duke went to his bed
In good will and in company
He came to Harrested.
Warnings came there from his band
That Magnus now would take his hand
And of his life him cheat.
St Knud he thought that they were mad,
In his heart he was right glad
That Mogens and he would meet.

4. That same night by a fireside,
Which Magnus'self did light,
Down near the town of Ringsted
Happ'd a wonder strange to sight.
As every man doth know
God let it happen so:
The duke's body there would fall
Arose a wonder fine and bright
That in that place did now give light –
The duke's prayers for us all.

5. Early in the morning light
A messenger came and bade

That he should come in Magnus's sight
And then in song he said:
'You, fine duke, without a frown,
You'll be betrayed in this same town,
That's something you should know.'
But Knud he would not see betrayal
In seeing falseness he did fail
Nor did he fear to go.

6. At the brow of a forest hill
The evil Mogens would slay:
Like a wolf he hoped to kill
The good duke on that day.
Like Judas with his kiss and hand,
So he too kissed, embraced the man,
Poison he harboured in his breast.
In the forest, Knud like a lamb,
Behind him evil Mogens came,
For Knud's dear blood did thirst.

7. They sat together'neath a tree,
Below a tall green beech,
And Mogens as evil as could be
Addressed to Knud this speech:
'Knud, which of us owns Denmark more
Come, with you I'll settle score,
Before you or I go back.'
Saint Knud, he looked now at his side
The murderers did there abide
And soon they would attack.

8. It fell to Knud these words to say,
And he pronounced them so:
'That I cannot you e'er betray
The forthright man doth know.
In word or deed I ne'er mispaid you
Always with comfort I allayed you:
I never did you ill.
What's become of trust, peace, good,
And what's become of brotherhood?'
The duke he asks him still.

9. Mogens his head with sword he hacked
Knud's brains and blood he spilled.
It indeed was a tragic fact –

His men were gone when he was killed.
Then they ran him through with spear,
And his heart and lung did tear.
The blood came streaming out so fast
A spring arose there plain,
Well St Knud endured his pain
The traitor fled at last.

10. Now is Knud in heaven's bliss,
With joy he's awaited there,
For God will surely grant him this,
Render him His peaceful care.
O Jesus Christ we servants all
To you, our patron dear we call
Let not our enemies us betray
Through your death and judgment great,
Let us pass through heaven's gate.
Your grace of you we pray.

Vedel added two further stanzas to this ballad as well as to another concerning King St Knud. These stanzas, he noted, were commonly sung in his day. They have been published by Pedersen (1986, 102) and are translated below:

11. Denmark, Denmark your glory sublime
Of joy you well may boast.
Yours are a king and a duke most prime
In the chorus of the heavenly host.
They are your friends dear
By God they're seated near,
You to guard and aid.
You flowers of Denmark two
Help now with counsel true.
We ask you unafraid.

12. To You, oh Lord, we humbly call
You, blessed Trinity.
And to your saints, yes one and all
Let honour and praise there be.
Oh St Knud you monarch fair,
Help us with your ardent prayer,
In paradise we turn to you.
St. Knud, you duke so kind and nice

Help us to reach that paradise
When these our days are through.

Ballad of St Knud Lavard (Vedel, It hundrede uduualde Danske Viser)

This Duke Knud was the son of King Erik
Ejegod, who was the brother of King St
Knud. Both were sons of Svend
Estridson. This story of Duke Knud is
found in Saxo's Chronicle, Book XIII.
Those who wish to know more can read
there about what events transpired
thereafter. At Harrested church in
Zealand, one Danish mile
[c. 6–7 kilometers] northeast of Ringsted,
one can find even now a spring described
in this ballad. Great misdeeds were done
in connection with it in the old days of the
papistry. St Knud the duke was slain in
the year of Our Lord 1130, on the seventh
day of January, before noon.

1. Sing we now of Knud the duke
A man so fine and free,
Who ruled o'er Slesvig without rebuke
In good will, courteously.
2. Injustice he ended with verdicts true,
And gladdened the hearts of those
Whose pious hearts had come to rue
Their homeland's many woes.
3. Far and wide the tales went round,
His merits all did know.
His reputation pure and sound
Did irk the wicked so.
4. His cousin Magnus, his uncle's son,
As equals would not stay.
Soon plotting evil had begun –
He wished him to betray.

5. He sent to Knud a fervent plea
To meet in Harrested wood.
He wished that they could hold parley;
His thoughts were false, not good.

6. The duke he trusted his kinsman so
None could him now dissuade:
He meant unto the wood to go
Just as his cousin bade.

7. The sixth day of the New Year
That was Epiphany,
To Harrested he drew near,
The duke full readily.

8. Bright, early on the next day
The duke made ready to ride,
He earnestly started on his way
To come to Magnus's side.

9. The two lords in the grove did meet
Their talk begins just so.
His cousin would the duke now cheat
And lay his kinsman low.

10. Right soon Knud saw an armèd band
All in their armour clad
A new event was now at hand,
'Twould make the duke most sad.

11. With gentle words and friendly mien
He asked now Magnus fair
If in treachery and falsehood mean
He did break his honour there.

12. He answers that 'The time has come
To divvy up the land.
And which of us will inherit from
the king, my father's, hand?'

13. He drew his sword with anger great,
The other little expected.
He struck his cousin on the pate
As wounds there soon reflected.

14. The other traitors sprang as well

With swords and spears for slaughter.
Upon the injured duke they fell
And wouldn't give him quarter.

15. That noble blood they shed that day
And for it did not fret
A pious noble they did slay –
Magnus would that deed regret.

16. He thought that he could falsely take
His bold opponent's life,
And Denmark's king himself thus make,
And never suffer strife.

17. His plans were wrong in many ways,
On falsehood he relied.
His plotting did not aid his days,
And for his crime he died.

18. "Twas something that God willed,'
The bishop Ser did state,
'That this good man was killed
And his slayer met his fate.'

19. In the place where the duke had stood
God caused a spring to grow,
That over innocent blood
Clear water now should flow.

20. With God as our foundation,
In him we can well trust.
He will not us abandon –
He metes out judgments just.

Ludus de sancto Kanuto duce: A Play concerning Saint Knud, Duke

A play about the holy Duke Knud, who was the son of Erik Ejegod, who was the king of the Danes, Duke of Slesvig, Slavonia, and the Wends, and was appointed and crowned king of the Obotrites by Emperor Luthair. On account of suspicion from the Danish royal court, Knud was enticed to an ambush under the pretence of a secret, friendly dialogue by his cousin, Magnus, son of the Danes' then

reigning King Niels. On the seventh of January, year of our Lord 1130, he was disgracefully butchered in a forest neighbouring Haraldsted, from which he was conveyed to the Holy Bent's shrine in Ringsted. He was also taken into the host and worship of the saints and canonized in the year 1170, as his son, Valdemar the First, had requested from the Roman pontiff.

The herald to the audience:

Prologue:

Hark and hear ye to this sound
Both winter, spring, and all year round.

To this you all should close attend,

Merchant, Cleric and Freemen

Gather round so all might hear.

Therefore, I pray all who stand near,
If you would silent stay,

So you might see in this play,

How falsehood rewards its master.

Righteousness now is dead.

In all the world danger is in each head;
I wish the truth here to record.

Who now would go with reason and law,

Is either killed or made outlaw.

We must all be tested so.

It is shown through this play,

That none can defend, though he may

Who wishes rule and law to try.

Many are brought to their demise,
Those without reason and law in their eyes.
One we wish to present to you,
Who was a pious and devout man,
– Duke Knud call him you can –
If you take notice and listen true.
Now we wish Saint Knud to play, (25)
As is our custom on Epiphany day,
How to his death he did go.
He bore death without great harm
For he regained heaven's pleasure and charm
And overcame pain and sorrow.

Erik Ejegod addresses the people and says:

Erik Ejegod is my name,
I want you all to know,
That my fame extends across all Denmark,
And to many other lands.
They say I am king of Denmark
And have led my people with zeal.
Now I am old and gray
I will soon have need of rest, not rigour.
Tyrne Hætte, our royal herald,

Ready yourself at once.

Summon here our counsellors with their trains,

– Ride swiftly over land and heath –

To speak with them for the kingdom's sake.

You shall tell what we want.

Depart quickly without delay

And do not dally with them too long.

The herald answers the King and says:

Your Grace, I will take care of this matter.

I will bring them your letter

And return, as soon as I may.

My vow I give as this I say. (50)

The herald to the counsellors:

Prosper! Lords and counsellors of Denmark,

To you both courtesy and honour.

Take this for neither mock nor scorn

That I have come before you.

You must now come before my lord,

He commands you so.

For you this will prove a great boon,

If you wish to remain his friend.

*As they descend from the palatium, the
herald announces their coming and says to
the king:*

My lord, your counsellors have here arrived.

What shall they do?

They eagerly wish to hear

Your grace's will, purpose, and intent.

The king catches sight of the counsellors and speaks with joy:

Besides God, you are our counsel and solace,

Have thanks, you will hold our behest

And will come here to us,

Now we all will hold counsel,

A new custom we will begin,

That will prove a boon to Denmark.

Soon we will take counsel,

As we stand together all,

You will hear our will.

Tell if this be good counsel,

That I wish to say to you,

Advise us well on what we now should do.

The second counsellor answers the king:

When we understand your intent, (75)

What you have set forth,

We would follow you to death,
How can we answer better?
Tell us your grace's heart's desire,
We wish to follow and serve you –
So let it be, my lord – this instant,
With us and all our men.

The king answers the second counsellor:

Your counsel and answer well pleases us,
For this follows both law and reason.
You are both clever and wise throughout.
Our intent for you is clear
We wish to tell you and spare nothing
Right now, this very instant:
We wish to give you a new king
Who will understand you with Christian sense;
Proclaim it thus to all of Denmark:
We will ride forth to a foreign land,
Over ground and white sand,
In a little while we shall be underway.
We wish to do this without delay.
We take our dear wife with us,

But Harald shall stay at home,
He shall have the crown and the royal name,
This will be a boon for all of Denmark,
You will give him all our revenue.(100)

The first counsellor answers the king:

Good counsel is now dear.

I say this to your grace:

If Harald shall be king and lead the land,

All Denmark will come to calamity.

Lord, stay at home and lead us – this I advise –

As God has given you fortune;

And Denmark's land will not come to calamity,

If Your Grace may consent to this.

The second counsellor says to the king:

Gracious lord, do not travel abroad,

All Denmark's fate rests in your hand,

You should lead and advise the land.

Something will befall your grace,

Your lords and princes will lament,

And Denmark's land fall in great harm.

The king answers him:

Though Denmark is most dear to us,

We will not postpone our journey.

We cannot delay any longer here,

We must all submit ourselves to God.

Dear friends, do not advise against this,

– Do not ask that I resist God –

Going to that holy grave,

From which I can receive forgiveness for my sins.

Again the first counsellor answers the king:

Dear lord, listen now to me,

What I wish to tell Your Grace:

Please mark my words!(125)

All the people who reside in Denmark,

They await disputes and great unrest,

Now their hearts will be greatly pained.

They pray Your Grace

That you stay home from Rome

And lead Denmark's realm.

They wish to give your grace silver and gold

Faithfully serve you and be loyal subjects,

Where can one find your like?

Erik Ejegod answers the first counsellor:

Alas, how sorrowfully my heart beats!

If I may not have my will,

The wound will go with me to death,

I do not much esteem your gift.

I will forsake both folk and land

I wish to journey to holy bliss.

Lord Harald, my son, the young man,

Take heed of him now well.

The second counsellor says farewell to the king:

God grant Your Grace safe travel,

We now need counsel and help,

But Harald shall be king.

He will be unto us neither friendly nor good,

But will stand ever against us,

I swear it on my honour.

Nevertheless, we will submit closely to him,

Heed him and call him king, (150)

Unless he breaks with custom

And wrongly faults our established ways;

Then we will cast him from the throne:

He will not enjoy freedom.

Now the king leaves towards Rome,

while Harald makes a proclamation:

Behold your king of Denmark's realm,

He shall please you well.

All the provinces shall submit to me and yield,

We will have our war taxes paid.

You shall help us with your silver and gold.

This is the first matter we intend

If we should be both faithful and gracious,

Both to knights as well as swains.

Your lands you shall render unto us,

This we declare as our judgment.

You shall stand close beside your king

And quarrel not with him.

Should anyone dare speak against him,

And if our will be not done,

We shall hew from that one both hand and foot,

That should all of you know.

The first lord answers:

Lord Harald, you are King Ejegod's son,

Hear my words and grant my suit.

This is the people's will,
That we consult and make you answer.
Because of the things you have proposed, (175)
We wish to part from you.

And they take counsel about deposing

Harald. The first lord says:

You lords, let us here find a means
Of giving answer to the king,
For he wishes to expel us all:
He will not spare our children.
Do you think that this can be good,
If we take from him both land and fort,
Or he gives us great torment?
If he remains in power, as he intends,
From us indeed, as I have said,
He will slay us all.

The second lord answers the first:

If we could find a stain upon his honour
He would go hence from our realm,
No longer our king to be.
Unless he loses his arrogance,
We shall never be good to him,

While we alive may be.

The third lord answers:

We wish to give him our answer,

Naught else would we do.

He displays an evil disposition:

We wish against him to revolt and dispute.

Our lands will we not turn over to him,

He may not expect them of us,

We will all say no to him,

Or I shall drown myself. (200)

*Harald's first servant notifies him of the
lords' conspiracy:*

Lord Harald, this say I to you,

The counsellors of Denmark wish to betray you.

This you must certainly know:

They have prepared a blow against you

They mean to do you evil,

If you remain at home.

Harald's second servant:

If you could be careful it would be well,

Lord this should you note:

The Danes wish to strike you down,

They are coming here in good strength.

Harald answers his servants:

If they come to us with peace and tranquility,

They shall live with us in the provinces,

Our friendship shall they have.

If they wish to pick a quarrel with us,

We will drive them forth from Denmark,

And put an end to their days.

Now they come to Harald's palatium.

*Skjalm, the leader of the king's army
says:*

Lord Harald, look and go forth,

The Danish counsellors are here.

Go and speak a word with them:

They wish to make great complaint and allegation against you.

They say you have established a different law and custom

Than what there was before you.

Our Danish law you tread underfoot

And have confiscated their property.

Unless you take counsel with them at once (225)

Among the people you shall go.

You should grant us peace and harmony,

Or we will not spare your life.

Harald with anger.

I will now ride to the farmer's stead,

And take from him both ox and cow,

Since you have threatened me thus.

If I succeed, as I intend,

You shall suffer beneath my power

And come in torment and duress.

Harald descending from the palatium,

*catches sight of a woman walking by and
addresses her.*

Where are you going, my sweet rose

Since you travel thus alone?

Your nose is so pretty,

Your hands so white and soft,

Would you sleep with me tonight?

This will do you no harm –

I will give you a great jewel and treasure,

That shall benefit you greatly.

The woman responds to Harald:

I am going to the next village on an errand,

to have a new cape cut for me,

For now there is peace in the land.

I may indeed walk about alone

For there is peace here for both high and low,

That I tell you verily.

Lord Harald, if you wish to take me by force,

I will have your fine head hewn off. (250)

Let me go hence, so that I can collect my cape,

Or you shall flee the land because of me

And I shall have shame because of you

And all shall speak ill of you.

Harald replies:

Be you maid or be you not,

That's no concern of mine.

It doesn't help that you say no,

I shall have my way with you.

I shall nibble up your white foot,

While everyone is asleep,

Then I shall have cure from my malaise

Which I have had so long.

*He throws her down in front of him and
the woman says:*

Oh woe, Harald, what have you done?

You have thrown away your honour, reputation, and word
Before a wretched woman.

I will decry you before ladies, maidens, maids,
Before knights and swains before I die,
That I here declare.

*The woman goes to accuse the king
before the court.*

You lords and nobles, who in Denmark reside
Hear what I plead and allege before you
How Lord Harald treated me,
He who would bear a royal name:
My maidenhood he has taken from me
With force and against my will.
This he did with falsity and deceit
You should part him from his life.

Skjalm answers the woman:

Woman, what has Lord Harald done?
Let us hear now all.

The woman replies:

He has lain with me and led me into disrepute,

What else should he do?

Skjalm:

If he starts a game of this sort,
He shall no longer be our king,
This I declare to you in judgment.

Skjalm says to Harald:

Harald, welcome home,
Take heed and care of your young life
We will dispute with you now.
You have squandered your life and your honour
For you shall have shame, mockery, and derision,
And from Denmark shall you flee.
Go forth at once and without delay
Or you'll soon find yourself hanging from the gallows,
We will thus cheat and betray you.

Harald:

I shall now flee from the realm of Denmark,
That I may remain alive.
But if my children live in this town,
They shall remain here after me. (296)

[Lacuna: A portion of the text is missing here. Further, Birket Smith misordered a page in his 1868 edition at this point. In his 1970

edition and notes, Kjær reordered the pages. The following text follows Kjær's order and line numbers.]

King Niels:

Give everyone his due, (297)

This will give you fortune and stand you well,

Be you knights, ladies, maidens, or maids.

Then will you be delivered of all

obligation/duress, that you have had (300)

If you heed what I have said

And follow my bidding and command.

Margareta, King Niels's wife, summons

Knud and Magnus and addresses

Magnus:

Mogens, my son, I say to you,

With counsel and maternal instruction:

You must not act with falsity and betrayal,

Treat your friends with honour.

Heed always your brother Knud;

Drink and gaming always eschew,

Hold ever to the best.

To knight and swain dole out your gold

Then you shall be good and virtuous.

Oh when you go on visits,

Express yourself well and hold your tongue.

Let your will be guided by your heart,

Thus will you earn much honour.

Treat ladies and maidens with love,

That they may praise and extol you far and wide

Wherever they may be.

Magnus answers:

Mother, I thank you for your good instruction.

If I come to the pope or the emperor in Rome⁴

My words I will well express.

I will drink and be free/generous

Should it cost me ten gold crowns.

Martial exploits I will practise.

I will not follow at Knud's foot, (325)

I have never been fond of him,

The truth I will now tell you:

I have a deep distrust of him,

It stings me ever in the heart,

I will not keep silent about this to you.

Margareta answers Magnus:

God forfend, my darling son,

That any should this hear!

But would that you might hear my plea
And inflict no harm on him!
You are each other's flesh and blood,
You must not bring him damage or ruin
But always be of good heart towards him
If you would ever have any good from me.

Magnus says to his mother:

No! I cannot this forget,
Mother I say this to you on my honour,
Although he is my kinsman.
All the places that I travel to,
I will do him both harm and shame,
Evil will I ever inflict upon him.

Margareta summons Knud:

Come here to me, little Knud,
I have something to tell you.
Listen to my word and speech:
Mons, my son, is rather rash
And is near crazed and mad
I want to confide this to you. (350)
Remember ever the great affection

I have always shown you,
Hold him as your brother.
I have loved you and cared for you well,
That I tell you on my soul,
As if I had been your own mother.
If he will practise some evil or malice,
Chastise him as it befits,
He shall suffer this from you.
What you begin with discipline and honour
Let him not be far from you,
But hold him ever by your side.

Knud to her:

Mother, I will answer you well,
It is only fitting I do so:
I will do him his due,
Never else shall you hear.
If anyone will stand against him
Him shall I resist
I will shed my blood for him
And flee with him from this land.

Margareta:

Knud, give me your white hand,

I give you this armband,
Will you wear this for my sake?

Knud:

Mother, thanks for your gift,
I will accept it gladly
This say I on my honour.

*A messenger comes and announces the
death of Duke Oluf [Eliv] of Slesvig:*

Alas and alack, the distress of the world!

Great sorrow may there be

The duke of Slesvig is now dead,

This I announce to you all here.

The lords of Holsten meet in council,

Townsfolk, farmers, and clerics,

A great dispute arises amongst them.

This should you all take note of:

Unless there be another lord over them soon

Who can rule and reign over them,

If they themselves rule for long

All Denmark will be harmed.

The King [Niels] says to the lords:

You noble Danish men, listen to me:

A new tidings I will tell,

Which doth please us ill:

Duke Oluf he is dead

And the people of Holsten are in great distress

That he has been taken so soon from this life.

Let us now all take counsel together,

That we may obtain a new duke of Holsten

Who can rule them with honour,

Lest they have decided – as I am informed –

That they no longer wish to be under the Danish crown. (400)

Skjalm answers the king:

Lord, that seems good to me

That we who have land and castle,

We be content with your proposal.

Here is a squire that I know well,

That is little Knud, your brother's son,

His state is humble indeed.

Make him the duke down in Holsten,

That he may be near at hand,

That I say by your grace.

Dear lord, hear my petition,
And God repay you for it,
And this will benefit him greatly.

The king answers Skjalm:

Dear Skjalm, on account of your goodness and your petition
I shall give the dukedom to Knud,
My brother's son.

Now the king says to Knud:

Little Knud, kneel down before me,
I will grant you now gold and property,
A duke shall you become.
You shall be duke of Holsten,
That shall be delivered entirely into your hand.
Rule with propriety and reason
Both the poor and the rich.
Banish injustice and judge rightly all your days,
Let yourself not be deceived by favours or gifts.
Above all, serve God always (425)
Love the servants of His holy word and hold to His commands.
This will I instruct you
If you wish to be righteous before God.

Knud withdraws from the king:

I thank your grace right well

For all this honour you have granted me

Now and for ever.

God grant me fortune,

That I shall rule Jylland well.

I will now ride there.

*Knud rides toward Slesvig, stands in the
palatium and says:*

By the counsellors of Denmark am I here sent,

I shall rule as duke here.

Among the folk am I well known

Note this, my good friends.

If you will acclaim me, as is the ancient custom

I will hear this of you.

I will send you both peace and tranquility,

Say what you shall do.

One of the nobles answers the duke:

If you will be unto us both gracious and good,

And advise us in our long strife,

Which we have so long endured,

Then be you welcome, Duke Knud.

If you will ride out for our sake

And hunt down and hang the thieves, brigands, and foes.

Knud answers:

Tell me who this may be

Who does you harm. (450)

Even if I should never again be able to wield weapon and sword,

I would punish him.

Even if it were my brother,

I would not spare him.

If he should act in evil or malice

Right poorly should he fare.

The first townsman in Slesvig answers the duke:

Dear Knud, long has there been trouble here,

In this duchy:

Locks or bars do us no good,

Be we poor or rich.

Pigs, sheep, geese, ox, and cow,

Gold and silver white

All this is stolen from the farmer's stead,

We all must endure and suffer.

The duke answers:

I'll soon put an end to that, if I can,

Or call me not a Christian man.

I will now declare:

Tyrne Hætte, Heynebenck, and Thyge Hængop,

Poul Plade and Asertop,

Ye shall punish this here.

Find all miscreants, robbers, and thieves,

To the rack and the gallows, give none reprieve

Let the land enjoy peace.

Hunt out magic and heresy

Let them be brought to justice, we bid you, (475)

Let them be roasted and grilled.

The duke's first servant, Heynebenck,
answers:

Yes, lord, we shall punish them

And see if we can procure peace for the farmers.

The second servant, Thyge Hængop,
answers:

I will now swear and not lie,

Even if there were twenty-four men

I would have stayed silent long.

They'd be tooting St. Peter's horn

And never more be stealing farmer's grain:

I would hang them all.

*As they talk, the third servant arrives,
Poul Plade, with a complaint for the
duke and says:*

Dear lord, my horse, that I had thought to sell

Is now stolen from my stable,

What shall I do about this?

I may now ride the apostles' horses

That stands in the Holy Writ

My sword I will employ.

The third servant Asertop:

Lord, let us travel the realm over

After you passed judgment over thieves,

They began to steal more than ever.

Not a calf nor a sheep, nor a hen, nor a goose

Can a farmer hide under lock and key –

He can hardly hide himself.

The duke answers his servants:

Travel about as one man,

Spare not a single thief

Some by sea and some by land

Guard well your life and limb. (500)

If you find anyone, send him here.

I'll give them something to do with their time:

They shall hang in the gallows.

And if word of this comes to Gottorp castle⁶

Then ladies and maidens will embrace you,

You dashing young lads.

Here a hunt for thieves takes place. One is captured and is led before the duke, and the swain, namely Poul Plade, says to the duke:

Dear lord, see what we have done,

I know right well, you have long known of it,

And have from others heard,

How we have put them to the stake and buried them alive

As you commanded from your throne.

A thief have we brought to you:

He says he is your kinsman,

He stands with his hands tied behind his back.

What shall we do with him?

Shall we torture him upon the gallows

So that his neck bones creak?

Let us know what we should do.

The duke answers:

Hang the thief up on the gallows limb
And let not the ground touch his shinbones.
Lay about his neck a noose
Of Kalmar silk, and make it right strong,
Let him not have great pain and ache,
Bid him to think steadfastly of God.

*Now the thief is hanged. After the thief is
hanged, Magnus says to the king's nobles:*

Hear me all you good Danish men,
I come with decency and honour.
Duke Knud, whom you have sent to Holsten,
Who should be a duke over Holsten,
He has gained such great renown,
That it is a pity to hear.
He is called a king in every town:
He may do ill out of this.
Dear Lord Skjalm, proclaim this to His Grace the king,
Give him to understand,
That he may find some way and means for this,
This should he not suffer.

Skjalm answers Magnus:

If Knud has taken the name of king upon himself,

This is indeed serious harm.

If he does not prove useful in Holsten,

He will suffer royal wrath.

Magnus answers Skjalm:

Believe me, Lord Skjalm, I speak the truth,

I may well swear to that:

Knud does evil and acts with falsehood.

He respects not the king of the realm of Denmark,

He takes upon himself a royal title,

As we hear tell from everyone,

In the world he considers no one his equal.

Another noble says to the king:

Gracious lord, what course should you now take?

Your land and people stand now in harm's way.

Duke Knud, whom you have granted Holsten (550)

To drive your grace out he does intend:

He would bear the crown.

The king answers him:

If Duke Knud acts with falsity and betrayal,

If he wishes to crown himself,

We will have our revenge on him.

We bid him be called at once before our throne,
And will hear ourselves his own words:
To Ribe do we summon him.

*The messenger summons the duke to
counsel in Ribe:*

With this letter, Lord Duke Knud,
King Niels does command you,
That you come at once to Ribe
Or he will avenge himself on you.
You have cast slander upon his name,
Consider how you will answer him.
He has turned his wrath upon you,
God shield your life from the danger.

The duke speaks with his wife:

Dear wife, what is happening?
If the king wishes to arrest me
How shall I answer him?

The wife answers:

The best advice I can give you is this:
You are a capable man,
Be on your guard with him.

The duke answers his wife:

I will go to His Grace,

And hear what answer I shall receive.

The wife says to Knud:

Magnus, your kinsman, he is a villain indeed, (575)

I fear his heart is full of betrayal and evil,

His intent and mind are malicious.

For nine years, I know right well,

He has tried to have you slain,

Trust him not at all.

The duke answers his wife:

King Niels himself has summoned me,

I may not do anything but go.

He has called me specifically by name.

I wish to hear my offence.

Nothing will turn me from this decision,

I wish to go to him

Right away will I go to him

And would not avoid it.

*As the duke nears the king's palatium,
the herald says to the king:*

Lord Duke Knud, he is now arrived,

He wishes to answer Your Grace himself,
What you would accuse him of.

The king answers:

Bid him go in for counsel and judgment,
And let him speak plainly in our midst
At once and without delay.

The herald to the duke:

My lord is deeply angered at you,
I wish you were on Blackeheed far away,
Rather than before this court.

Knud answers:

Now help me, Mary, Virgin mild,⁷
If I should receive death from him
Or become the king's prisoner. (600)

And the duke says to the king:

Gracious lord, what do you accuse me of,
Or what is my offence?
Tell me that at once,
Why you wish to threaten me thus?

The king says to the duke:

Dear Knud, you have forfeited your life:
Against Denmark you have picked a quarrel,
Away is now cast your honour.
You have imposed a law in Jutland,
Which is lamented by both high and low,
You would be king.
You return me much evil for much good
You wish to rob us of both land and castle.
Do you wish to answer to these charges?
Let all here standing hear what you say,
Or soon you'll go into the tower,
Even though you are our brother.

The duke answers the king:

Gracious lord, let me make answer:
They say that I wish to depose you,
As they now make complaint of me?
There was a law in southern Jutland,
Long before I served as your deputy
And have been for many a day.
There neither lock nor key availed,
They stole away the farmer's lamb and geese.

I have remedied that situation. (625)

If someone loses his goods and his neighbour takes it up,
Let each regain what they originally had,
That I say unto Your Grace.

The other thing you said to me,

That too I wish to answer:

The title of king have I never given myself,

Nor has it come to me by inheritance,

Nor do I wish to bear that title

Even if someone wanted to give it to me.

But such a law have I enjoined,

As I have spoken before Your Grace.

The king praises the duke's deeds and says:

Dear Lord Knud, be not upset,

Our friendship shall you enjoy.

It was very good that you came here yourself,

We wish to entertain you as our guest.

For Christmas shall you come to Roskilde –

There we will be as long,

You shall benefit from that all the days,

If we may spend the time with you.

Magnus, our son, shall supply you with all

That you may desire.

This evening he has arranged shelter for you

Is that not nobly done?

Duke Knud, come to us here,

You may not do anything but this (650)

For this Christmas holiday season

Your standard shall be borne before you here.⁸

The duke answers the king:

Gracious lord, I thank your grace,

That I may serve you again in some manner,

You shall find me quite willing,

In my mind and heart,

Here is my hand to betoken

That I shall come to you if at all I can.

*While the duke hurries to his own
palatium, the herald speaks with the
townsfolk of Roskilde while awaiting the
king's arrival:*

You townsfolk of Roskilde, hear my words,

Set food to the fire and ready the tables,

The king is on his way here.

This Christmas he wishes to stay here,

You should give him enough to eat

Take good care of him.

The first townsman of Roskilde:

We will provide for his grace,

Even if he were to stay here a whole year.

You may answer him thus.

This clear wine we would pour for him,

And all that his heart desires,

That we would bear before him.

The herald says to the king:

Go to Roskilde right away,

The Roskilde townsfolk have prepared everything for you.

Thus have they given me to understand,

That there have already come foreign visitors:

I saw their attire and heard their speech, (675)

A lord from a foreign land.

The king says to the nobles:

To Roskilde shall we now all go,

Ladies, maidens, both knights and swains,

We are now a mighty host,

There we will find our friends.

Duke Knud of Slesvig is there,

Whom we have just invited as our guest

When we were in Ribe –

Among lords and princes is he intimate.

Magnus, our son, you shall serve him:

Provide him with both food and bed,

The same shall my hearty swains undertake;

Thus shall your friendship be long confirmed.

Magnus answers:

Father, I will treat and deal with him such

As all the lords of Denmark would expect.

This may also come to pass

That he may never more travel in his youth,

Nor pick a quarrel with me or with you, Before the game is up.

*The king arrives in Roskilde; Magnus
summons four of the realm's greatest
men and holds counsel with them
concerning the duke:*

Hage Skåning, count Ubbe, Erik Skadelår,

Hage Normand, you are all good.

If you will help me with what I propose

Then I shall soon have a remedy for my ailment.

I have a matter in my bosom,

Which you ought to hear about: (700)

My heart is wrenched with hatred.

Would you assist me?

Would you suffer for me today?

Let me know your mind,

And be of assistance in this matter,

And say whether I can rely on you.

Hage of Skåne answers Magnus:

So help me the holy light!

I can well venture

To give you warning

If anyone plans evil against you.

I will be on your side.

Anyone who has spoken word against you,

That I will swear to you here and now.

Not the king himself of the Danish realm

Shall be my equal in battle:

I can defend myself quite well.

Erik Skadelår:

Magnus, the devil himself

Will be shamed when I am angry.

When I have a cup for my thirst,

I spit, shit, fight,

And bite like a stinging ant.

Magnus, you can depend on me:

If you bid me to, I will push one away from you

I will stand fast by your side

Come what may.

Well may you rely on me,

This I swear with all my might.

Hage Normand:

Magnus, I wish to say the same:

I would also stand by and fight,

I would dare to do so for you.

I have drunk a hot cup before

And not burned my tongue nor hurt my speech,

This I tell you on my word.

Whatever you will, begin it manfully

As a brother I will help you;

To avenge offences or harm you have suffered,

I shall not fail to do so.

Magnus answers:

My thanks, good lords, who stand here,

That you would stand by me,

To hack, pierce, and strike to death,

And then to flee the land

When I call you to assemble

And avenge my harm.

I gladly pray that you see to it

That you make no mention of this.

Magnus goes up to the palatium of Roskilde with the aforementioned retainers. The duke is speaking in his palatium with his wife and says:

My darling, hear my word,

Go now with this Lord Tordt,

And travel to Roskilde, my darling one.

King Niels has invited us to be his guests

I would not fail to attend him there (750)

For my best horse.

Knud's wife answers:

Duke Knud, my dear life,

Stay instead with me at home.

Magnus holds a sore grudge against you

You should think twice yourself.

He wishes to kill you at once

I would give you to understand.

I know he has never meant you well,

He does you harm and distress.

Knud answers his wife:

Dear life, what is it you say?

We were born of two brothers

He cannot do what you describe.

He has always loved me well

Should he now strike me dead?

How can one imagine such?

Dear wife, think not so,

I can well say no for him:

He has never meant me ill:

He is my own flesh and blood,

I believe he would not speak against me.

Think not at all otherwise.

The wife says to Knud:

Your trust is too great,

It will prove harmful to you yourself.

Trust not his words, hear now my voice,

He means to do you ill. (775)

His beard is as red as a fox.

If you do not take care,

Your blood he will have:

He does not intend to spare you.

The duke answers his wife with anger:

Cold is ever woman's counsel.

Shall I be regarded with scorn because of you

If I fail to come to him?

I will tell you what you are to do:

Stay at home with your own maidens

If that proves of any use to you.

Soon I shall set forth to the king,

Or my name is not Duke Knud.

You must protect yourself.

My dear life, good night to you,

God do unto you what is good,

I will go forth to the king.

The duke departs towards the king's

*palatium and is welcomed treacherously
by Magnus. Magnus says:*

What has befallen you,

Why have you tarried so long?

What has hindered you,

Where is your nimble swain?

I have been awaiting you ever since autumn

When we were in Ribe

And you promised me on your word to come.

You have arrived at an ideal time.

You shall now be my father's guest (800)

And he shall make you glad and merry.

Of all people I hold you the best

Let all Denmark hear me.

The duke answers Magnus:

Magnus, well do I believe you,

That you will do me no injustice.

I believe not in the least

That you would do me ill.

Magnus answers the duke:

Tarry with me here a little while

My head is beginning to ache.

I am going to the forest of St George

To speak with Peder Lercke.

With him are three squires,

Their names I will not reveal.

We begin a battle, you shall see,

We will cause them to flee.

*As Magnus leaves the king's palatium
and goes towards the forest, Duke Knud
is met by the king. The king now says:*

Lord Knud, well do you keep your word,
Much benefit will come of this.

Wash your hands and take a seat at the table
We are glad of your arrival.

At once a table is laid and the king says:

Lord Duke Knud, be glad,
Drink with me now and take some food
You see now all the dishes.
When we two part company,
Tell your wife good night
And tell her that she shall receive that which I promised her.

Knud withdraws from the king:

I thank Your Grace greatly
For the invitation you have made unto me
Now and at other times.

We shall first drink St Gertrude's health⁹
Then shall we be glad and talk freely,

And then I shall ride away from you.

*Magnus steps forward by the grove and
plans treachery with the aforementioned
traitors. Magnus says in a loud voice:*

I am come to you

Without my own swain's knowing.

Of that which we spoke before,

May we now take counsel.

I tell you the reasons that lie in my heart,

I can no longer keep quiet

What I have so long concealed

And which I now say to you:

I thirst for the blood of my brother, Knud

Hear this, my good men, honourable and brave!

I was never of good heart towards him,

Whenever we were together.

I wish to kill him

Do you wish to help me?

Against him I would venture both life and soul

This I say to you here assembled.

The first traitor, namely Earl Ubbe, answers:

If you first lay hand on him,

I will not fail you.

I desire to wound and slay him (850)

And then flee with you from the realm.

The second traitor, namely Erik

Skadelår, answers:

Knud has harmed you much,

Magnus, let him now suffer.

Despite his great strength

We will not spare him from death.

The third traitor, namely Hage of Skåne

[or Hage Normand?] *answers:* [10](#)

Ready I am to slay mightily,

I can do much by stealth

Were Lord Knud here now,

He'd soon lose his life.

The fourth traitor, Hage Normand

[or Hage of Skåne?]

Oh woe, what evil has here been planned,

This shall all of Denmark lament and bemoan.

Think upon that which you have contemplated.

I do not wish to be among you,
To pour out his innocent blood¹¹

From hate and for no offence.

Magnus, against you he has never been,

How can you threaten him so?

Now there is no trust left in the world

Since you would destroy Knud.

For the sake of truth I wish to say to you:

Guiltless goes he to his death

His blood will cry out to heaven of you¹²

Magnus, let him go instead,

God's vengeance will come over you for your falsity and betrayal

Let him remain alive. (875)

Magnus answers:

Strike down the fiendish thief

Who would not do my will.

Would you part me from my life?

You will bring us to harm.

I will now swear this upon salt and bread:

If you reveal us to anyone,

By my own hand shall I strike you dead.

It shall cost you dearly.

Hage of Skåne:

I will never tell of this,

But will let it all be as it is;

From you I will leave today

And never will I act like that as long as I am alive.

As the swain goes down, Magnus says:

Let us lie down on this ground

And swear to carry out this false murder.¹³

This I have said to him before,

That hatred was in my heart,

And that I would soon bring him to death.

Lie down at once by my side,

All Denmark shall come to know of this,

You cannot disregard it.

As he bends to the ground, Magnus says:

Cry we all now aloud with one voice,

I will make known my will,

Repeat after me my heart's desire,

That will prove fortunate for you all:

As truly as God helps us in our need, (900)

Tomorrow shall Duke Knud be dead,

We all desire to slay him!

This we all swear on our lives and souls!

Now they rise again, and Magnus says:

Let us stand up all at once

Take up your weapons all.

And wait with me here in his forest

I will not long be away.

Now Magnus hides the armed host and goes to the king's palatium and says to Knud:

Dear Lord Knud, how is it with you,

Do I find you here?

Knud:

Yes, Magnus, I am here,

What would you with me?

Magnus:

My dearest brother,

Knud Erik's son you are called,

Your servant was my mother¹⁴

Would you do me a favour?

Knud:

All that I can do to be of service,
That will I gladly do.
Magnus, I hold you dear to my heart,
Nothing else shall you ever hear.

Magnus answers:

From the depths of your heart you are trustworthy
My support I have thrown to you,
For this is fitting for me to do.
This is my great desire:
For the sake of God I will go to Rome
To travel there will I venture. (925)
My sins will I confess there
You are my close friend
Thus I may take counsel with you.
Answer me this, I ask you here,
For this I came to you:
This is important for us both.

Knud answers:

Our Lord has moved your heart,
Let him strengthen it with his grace!
All evil has he chased away from you,

He saves you from all woe,
For the sake of God spare yourself neither duress nor need,
Nor hunger, thirst, or sorrow.
For he suffered a hard death –
Upon the cross he willed to remain.
Repay him with the pilgrim's path,
This I counsel you openly.
So may God watch over you,
Your soul may he preserve in eternal joy.

Magnus answers Knud:

Listen, Knud, I have a secret plan
This will I not conceal.
Out to a secret spot shall we go,
There will I tell you of it.

Knud:

I will come as you see fit,
For peace would I counsel you.
Choose a spot and prepare it yourself, (950)
So that we two can gather there.

Magnus:

At Ringsted in the thick wood

I will speak to you from my heart's depth:

May we meet there tomorrow morning?

Knud:

There will I meet you without guile,

This I promise both you and God,

If I am alive to do so.

Now they take leave of each other.

Knud is led to Balstorp, but Magnus to the forest where the weaponed ones are hidden, and Magnus sends a summons to the duke. Magnus says to his herald:

Tyrne Hætte, ride off at once,

This will prove most profitable for you.

Take my summons to Duke Knud,

Bid him come to me.

Tyrne Hætte answers Magnus:

Magnus, wait for me in this forest

I will bring him back at once.

Tyrne Hætte goes to the duke and says:

Are you within, Duke Knud,

Are you sleeping or awake?

Come to the window

And draw open the hatch.

The duke answers:

Who are you who calls for me?

Do you have something to say to me?

The herald, Tyrne Hætte, answers:

Arise and go out right away

To Magnus without delay.

Knud answers:

Are you his servant and his messenger?

I will follow you, as God doth know.

The duke's first servant says to the duke:

Take your weapon along, Lord Duke Knud.

Be not so hasty in going: (975)

Go not tonight out to Magnus;

You can just as well meet him tomorrow.

The duke answers the servant:

In Denmark it is not customary

For one to need to go about armed

While the king's peace endures.

If one goes about with weapon in hand

Many may be imperilled,

Both here and in other lands.

The servant answers the duke:

Lord, take your servants along,
It is not fitting for you to ride alone
Else you risk your life
And suffer thus.

The duke:

When only one has been called for,
In truth, I wish to say,
No more than one shall come.
If one were to come unbidden,
Little would it benefit him.
No danger will I heed;
My brother Magnus will I meet,
As I promised and swore to him.
At Ringsted in the thick wood
I will seek him at once
This journey will I now venture.

*Knud goes with the herald. Tyrne Hætte
warns the duke of Magnus's ambush
with these words, which Tyrne Hætte sings:*

“The world is full of false deceit,

Happy is he who stays on his feet (1000)

There's lurking all woe behind every man's door

Now as it has been evermore.'

The duke:

You little swain, say at once,

If you mean me by that.

Now sings Tyrne Hætte a second time:

'Treachery and falsity,

My leader I will not betray.

He who longer would live and gladly so,

That one another way should go.'

The duke:

Dear kinsman, tell me,

If Magnus, my brother, wishes to betray me with falsity.

Tyrne Hætte says:

One should not esteem fair words

That come after deadly murder.

I cannot sing further

Let us at once to the forest go.

The duke:

Counsel me by God, what you will of me,

What do you mean by this?

Shall I beware someone?

Let me know this one thing.

The herald to the duke:

Dear Knud, let us go a little faster,

We tarry here too long.

Magnus has a great desire to see you;

His servants are all in bed.

*Now they go together to Magnus and
Magnus says to the herald:*

Tyrne Hætte, go over there to one side,

This I wish to command you. (1024)

Of what we take counsel you may not know:

You shall not reveal our conversation.

*Magnus embraces the duke and he kisses
him, speaking ingratiatingly and saying:*

You are most welcome here,

Receive my word of thanks

You shall now know that it is time

For me to talk with you.

To this wood, that stands nearby,

We two shall go down.

There shall you learn rightly

My reasons for wanting to talk.

Knud:

Gladly I will follow you, whither you will,

I am full ready to do so.

I know you mean me no ill,

And you bear no ire towards me.

*They near the forest, and the traitor sits
beside the duke. As the duke looks at
Magnus, he says:*

Dear brother, what have you to say,

Or what do you intend?

Why are you armed so?

Would someone fight with you?

Magnus:

An enemy I long have had

He has plagued my heart,

I wish to avenge myself on him.

Now I have everything prepared

At once to see his red blood run

His name I will soon name.

Knud:

Dear brother, make a sign of the cross

Let me bid and beg you; (1050)

With your enemy go not in treachery,

Lie not in wait for him here.

This is the holy season of Christmas

When Christ deigned to be born.

God let him never come here,

Whom you intend to slay.

Magnus:

I will soon avenge my harm and offence,

Knud, I tell you this here.

This sword I have beneath my arm,

Shall be his bane.

The duke says to Magnus with good will:

Dear Magnus, hear my plea:

You are my father's brother's son,

I wish to stand on your side.

Whoever has acted against you,

I will slay him before your foot,

If you will only wait as long

As it takes for Christmas to be over.
If you cannot turn your mind and will,
Then we two will meet here.
So manfully will I stand beside you
And both beat and slay your enemy,
For your sake I would go to my death.

Magnus:

Knud, you swear well to this here,
Your words are most sweet.
Listen to what I would say to you:(1075)
You shall not slay anyone here.

Magnus seizes the duke:

Now we'll hit on a new game,
Now that we're here:
Knud, to whom does Denmark belong?
Tell me that at once.

The duke answers Magnus:

Where should such a question come,
What should I answer to it?
Shall I come to harm or advantage?
Brother, what do you imagine?

Your father, my uncle
Is king of the realm of Denmark.
Thus say both men and women,
All should submit to him.

Magnus:

No indeed, Knud, that is not so,
All men would call you king and lord.
Therefore we wish to confront you –
It may not be so,
King Niels may put down all
And has made you a lord.
You believe that you have received the good fortune
To become the king.
All the world is on your side
You rule over all the provinces,
Knud you shall obey me,
You shall feel a pain of heart. (1100)

*As the duke looks around and sees the
weaponed ones hidden in the forest, he
says:*

Alas and woe over life and soul!
Why do you wish to betray me?

I have always been of good heart towards you
Wherever we two have been.
Friendship and trust has ended on earth,
And truth has been laid waste
Magnus, never should one believe your fair words
You wish to see me dead now.
Such treachery was never wrought
Since God made man upon earth.
Who has ever heard of so false a murder
As when I now forfeit my life?
All ye who are standing here about, mark well,
Both worldly men and clerics¹⁵
Good deeds are seldom well requited:
That you can well note here.
Guiltless my blood that you now spill,
Out of hatred and envy.
This our Lord, so mild and good knows,
As I go to my death.
Where now is the love,
Our kinship, and your honour?
I submit to God who knows all things
To judge between us two.

I have always treated you well (1125)

As I ought to have done,

And did you both justice and your due,

It astonishes me that you should so act.

But oh, Magnus, what have you done

Against the strong bonds of brotherhood?

Your heart has not followed your words,

My spirit is grieved that

You should wish to so forfeit your soul.

Your acts deserve little reverence

And go against the bidding of him who created you,

And who so pitifully lets me die.

You shall answer for this before God's strict justice,

When we meet before God.

This was truly evil that I ever came here

Since I shall so pitifully go to death.

O Jesus, Holy Spirit,

Who suffered torture for me,

From your hand I received both life and soul

Receive now my soul and forgive me my sins!

Magnus with anger:

Knud, keep quiet in the devil's name!

To all the holy saints you shall now whimper

You must now seek another port,

To the ground you now shall stoop.

Knud is thrown to the ground and Magnus says:

Even if I shall now go beneath the devil's foot

And there remain forever,(1150)

I shall see the blood of your heart

And you shall live no longer.

*He beats the duke again and calls upon
the other hidden traitors and says:*

You hearty and noble men

Who ate my bread with honour,

Why do you lie down and still remain hidden?

Shouldn't you stand beside me?

Come here at once, both pierce and slay,

We shall make his heart suffer,

So that he shall no longer go about the earth

Then we shall flee the land.

The first traitor, Earl Ubbe, answers Magnus:

Hear ye, comrades, let us go to Magnus all,

For I heard him shout and slay.

Duke Knud he will now strike down

We will never betray him.

*They approach Magnus and the first
traitor says:*

What harms you, Magnus, why do you shout?

We are all here in readiness,

To pierce and slay alongside you

Whomever you bid us to.

Magnus answers the traitor:

Strike with me, and I with you,

Duke Knud I will harm,

That is my will, I you so bid,

And be not slow about it.

The second traitor, Erik Skadelår:

This devilish knave I shall now kill,

I shall avenge myself on him by this sword,

That never more shall he threaten or menace you

Either in court or in summons. (1176)

The third traitor, Hage Normand:
Tread now all manfully forth

With sword and spear in hand,

This is the counsel that I would give,

Let us then flee the land.

Strike to the ground in the devil's name,

Magnus may bid us so,

We receive his favour, he gives us benefit,

Both gold and silver is given us readily.

*All strike the duke. After Knud is killed,
Magnus says:*

Good night, remain in peace,

I need no longer be on guard,

I shall now travel forth to another place

From Denmark will I go.

Duke Knud is struck down,

As he well deserved.

Listen all, did I not do well?

What think you, knights and swains?

Now I give up this kind of talk

I will ride off after this act.

I have deserved both reward and thanks,

My sword I will now sheath.

Let us soon leave this forest

Or we will face the wrath of the king

If we remain or stay here long

They will come seeking to harm us.

Let us away at once (1201)

To Nyborg or to Ribe,

Or the king will come with a great host

And shall take us all.

Epilogue:

You have now all seen and heard

And may also hear out in the world

What great strife

Kin and friends may have amongst themselves.

All the world is now filled with treachery,

All will betray each other.

One is not faithful nor loyal to another,

Either among the poor or the rich.

Fathers spare not their own sons

Such is a great misery to hear of,

Nor can a daughter her mother, who does not understand

But would do her harm.

When the tankard passes down the table

Then one has friends and kin,

All know and trust you so.

For all falsity and betrayal streams from their hearts.

When one is most in need, I speak the truth,

This is suffered by both poor and rich,

Then they go in hiding and do things untrue

And wish to pull away from you.

Who speaks fair words and smiles at you,

And yet is not your equal,

Go swiftly away from that one and be not slow,

He wishes to betray you.

This good Saint Knud suffered

Who happened to be a duke.

He gave his guiltless blood up

As you have all seen here.

He is certainly in the kingdom of heaven

And shares in the feast with all God's holy angels,

The eternal joy and holiness.

God the Father grant us all that in eternity.

AMEN.

NOTES

¹ All translations are ours, unless otherwise noted.

- 2 Melody taken from the Danish Church Ministry's music share website <http://www.km.dk/fileadmin/share/dokumenter/nyheder/salmebet/E-H.pdf>, accessed 10 February 2006.
- 3 It is uncertain whether productions of the *Ludus* followed the all-male cast custom of Germany and England or the mixed gender custom of France. Both are possible.
- 4 Magnus's seeming esteem here for the pope can be taken as an indication that the play was composed in the Catholic era.
- 5 An idiom for legs.
- 6 In his notes to the play, Kjær notes that this castle was not completed until 1268; therefore, Knud could not have stayed there.
- 7 This appeal to the Virgin Mary can be taken as evidence that the play dates from the Catholic era.
- 8 This image is clearly reminiscent of church frescoes of St Knud Lavard.
- 9 This custom was regarded as good luck for travellers and fell out of favour after the Reformation.
- 10 Kjær notes that the attribution of this and the following speech may have been reversed through scribal error; it is Hage of Skåne who eventually refuses to participate in the plot.
- 11 Here the play draws a parallel between Knud and Christ, as in the liturgical texts and *vitae* before it.
- 12 The play also employs imagery from the Genesis account of Cain and Abel, a classic tale of fratricide.
- 13 This detail occurs in Saxo's account (XIII, 7). Magnus and his conspirators make their plans while lying on the ground 'so that, should the matter chance to be discovered, they would be able to swear in safety that sitting or standing, his [Knud's] life had never been threatened by their designs' (*Gesta Danorum*, 125).
- 14 This is an obscure line which may represent a scribal error.
- 15 These lines appear addressed to the audience.

The Cult of St Eric, King and Martyr, in Medieval Sweden

TRACEY R. SANDS

Like other important saints, St Eric clearly fulfilled a variety of functions for those who venerated him as a saint, promoted his cult, or made use of his image or name. Along with the much later St Birgitta (1303–73), St Eric was the best known and most widely venerated of Swedish saints by the end of the Middle Ages. As such, it is no surprise that he has been the focus of considerable scholarly attention for well over a century. This chapter will survey the various functions and meanings that have been associated over time with the cult and image of St Eric in medieval and post-medieval Sweden, as well as noting important trends in the scholarship on the saint and his cult.

In many ways, the study of the early Middle Ages in Sweden presents a different set of problems than the same period in the rest of the Nordic region. Although the church seems to have been more-or-less established in Denmark by the later tenth century, and in Norway by the early eleventh century, it is not until the early twelfth century that ecclesiastical structures seem to be well in place in Sweden (see Sawyer and Sawyer 1993, 100–16; Nilsson 1998, 69–85). Certainly Sweden is mentioned in some of the sources commonly used to document the history of early Nordic Christianity. However, while Adam of Bremen refers to his long acquaintance with the Danish king Svend Estridsen – and even relies on him for some of his information on Sweden – he has no named Swedish informants, nor does he claim to have visited Sweden himself (*Gesta Hammaburgensis*, Book 4). Unlike their Nordic neighbours, the Swedes did not tend to commit their earlier history – or contemporary circumstances – to written text until far later than the period discussed here (see Sawyer and Sawyer 1993, 214–22, 230–3; Westman 1954, 1–2). One consequence of this fact is that there are no contemporary documents dating from the period before – or of – the reign of St Eric (1150–60). Instead, except for a small number of later, and quite possibly unreliable chronicles, our knowledge of the early medieval kings of Sweden is dependent on a handful of references to them in non-Swedish sources.¹

The earliest explicit reference to a cult of St Eric would seem to be

an entry in the calendar of the *Liber ecclesiae Vallentunensis*. This calendar, dated to around 1198, is the earliest known liturgical calendar from the archdiocese of Uppsala (see Helmfrid 1998, Schmid 1945). The entry for 18 May reads: ‘erici Regis.’ This entry is written in dark ink, not the red used for more important dates. No degrees of veneration are indicated in this calendar. It may be surmised that the rather large cross that appears directly after the entry (possibly added by a later hand) suggests that this feast was, or came to be, an important one (see Schmid 1945, Gallén 1976). As Tryggve Lundén (1983) notes, in order for St Eric to have been the object of a liturgical cult, his relics must have been elevated and enshrined some time before the date of the calendar. The Norwegian saga of King Sverir (who married Eric Jedvardsson’s daughter Margareta) – apparently begun in the 1180s and completed by the 1220s – mentions in passing that Eric had been enshrined by the time of the marriage of Sverir and Margareta (Carlsson 1944, 95; Gallén and Lundén 1960, 19). This might be seen as confirmation of the information from the calendar.

The existence of a cult requires the existence of some sort of legend (Gallén and Lundén 1960, 19). Scholars have argued considerably, however, about the age and origins of the only text of St Eric’s legend left to us. The majority seem to agree that it dates from the late thirteenth century. Many also concur in attributing it to Israel Erlandsson, who was a canon in the cathedral chapter at Uppsala during most of this period, and who appears to have been the author of many, if not all, of the narratives that describe the saint’s miracles (Westman 1954, 46; also Lundegårdh 1997).²

Knut B. Westman suggests, as does the text of the legend itself, that the author relies on a much older text for much of his information, perhaps one dating from the reign of Knut Ericsson (c. 1167–95 or 1196). This dating and attribution of the legend are not unopposed, however. Einar Carlsson (1944) has argued forcefully that the identification of Israel Erlandsson as the author of the legend is the result of scholars’ reliance on a presumed medieval chronicle of the bishops of Västerås. The chronicle states that Israel Erlandsson, who later became bishop of Västerås, was the author of the legend of St Eric. Unfortunately, however, the document appears to be a forgery from the hand of the infamous Nils Rabenius (1648–1717). In his turn, Rabenius seems to have derived his information about the legend’s authorship from Johannes Schefferus’s edition of the legends and miracles, published in 1675 (see Carlsson 1944, especially 155–8). Carlsson dismisses the reasoning behind Schefferus’s identification of the legend’s author and expresses his disdain for the scholars whom he considers to have been duped into following it. Instead, he argues that the legend in its extant form, the earliest manuscript of which dates

from 1344, was written in the late twelfth century, or at the very latest, before 1210 (Carlsson 1944, 128–41).

Although the extant legend is relatively short and sufficiently formulaic in its content that some scholars have completely rejected it as a historical source (see Carlsson 1944, 66–70), its episodes provide ample material for the many later meanings and uses of the cult of St Eric. Like many other saints, St Eric could be seen both as a powerful intercessor and as an example of pious behaviour. Other meanings also came to be associated with his cult. As the founder of an important dynasty of Swedish kings, Eric became a kind of holy and legitimizing ancestor. This connection would come to be significant not only for the saintly king's descendents in the direct male line, but also for other kings (and would-be kings). St Eric also came to be viewed as a patron for the archdiocese of Uppsala and for the kingdom of Sweden. His name and image became potent symbols of legitimate power in Sweden, and as such were invoked by the various factions in the political struggles that arose in later medieval Sweden.

According to the legend, Eric Jedvardsson, a man of noble ancestry, had been unanimously elected king of Sweden. He quickly distinguished himself as a just, honourable, and compassionate ruler, who refused to tax his subjects (telling them that their descendants might need the money at some time in the future), upheld the law, and supported the church. In his personal life, the king showed great piety, wearing hair shirts (one of which was found on his body after his death) and taking cold baths – even in winter – to strengthen his resolve when he abstained from the marriage bed on the occasions prescribed by the church. One of his many important acts was to complete the building of the great church at (Old) Uppsala, which had been begun by his forefathers. Once the kingdom was stabilized, St Eric turned his attention to converting the pagan populace. Together with his bishop, known in his own right as St Henrik, the king led a campaign ('crusade') against the western Finns, demanding that they convert to Christianity. In case such a crusade was in need of justification, the legend notes that the Finns had been doing harm to Sweden, and attacking and killing Christians. The Finns were largely unwilling to submit to King Eric's demands, and he was forced to slay large numbers of them in battle. After his victory was assured, however, he did not rejoice, but instead mourned that so many souls were lost before they could turn to God. The legend here compares the saint with Moses, who wept for the idol-worshippers after having them slain. Earlier, it has likened St Eric's church-building activities to those of Old Testament kings. In the final episode of this legend, St Eric's martyrdom is described. We are told that our saintly king was attending Mass at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Östra Aros.³ This

is a very interesting point because the ecclesiastical centre of the region would have been what was then called Uppsala (now 'Old' Uppsala). Later, however, Östra Aros would come to assume both the name and the functions of the older ecclesiastical centre. As King Eric listens to the divine services, he receives word that an enemy army is heading towards him, led by the Danish pretender, Magnus Henrikssen, who has claimed the Swedish throne by right of matrilineal descent. In spite of the warnings of his men, King St Eric insists on hearing the Mass to its conclusion before preparing for battle. Although he acquits himself manfully, we are told that the enemy army concentrates all its forces on attacking King Eric. After beating and torturing him, they finally strike off his head. When the king's men manage to recover his body, they note that a spring has arisen on the site of his murder. When the body is carried to the nearby cottage of a blind widow, the woman regains her sight after rubbing her eyes with the martyred king's blood.

This legend provides a basis for the many different meanings associated with the figure of St Eric in Sweden during and after the Middle Ages. Although such a description is hardly exhaustive, the most important meanings, functions, or uses of the cult of St Eric may be seen to fall into some six categories, which will be dealt with below in roughly chronological order.

A Struggle of Dynasties

Eric Jedvardsson's death occurred in a very unstable period for the Swedish monarchy. The two dynasties that had apparently ruled Sweden at least since the introduction of Christianity (the Uppsala dynasty and the Stenkil dynasty) had died out, and in their place, two factions of (according to tradition) aristocratic, but not royal, descent contended for power. Later historians refer to each of these groups by the names of their putative founders: the Sverker dynasty (or party) and the Eric dynasty. Sverker the elder, who was closely allied by marriage with Danish and Norwegian royalty, appears to have come to the throne around 1130, and to have reigned until some time in the 1150s. He was followed not by his son Karl (who instead ruled c. 1161–7), but by Eric Jedvardsson, who was thus the founder of the Eric dynasty (Westman 1954, 1–23). In fact, the Swedish throne would be held alternately by members of the Sverker and Eric dynasties in turn for over a century.

There can be no doubt that a saintly ancestor is just the thing to

legitimize a royal dynasty. For example, by the time of Eric Jedvardsson's death in battle, several members of the various branches of Denmark's contentious royal family had been promoted as saints. Indeed, two of them, St Knud, (one of the many sons of Svend Estridsen) who died in 1086, and his nephew Knud Lavard (d. 1131) actually received papal recognition, and were canonized at the behest of the relatives who had most to gain by promoting their cults. The cult of St Knud was promoted most strongly by his brother, King Erik Ejegod, who succeeded in bringing about Knud's canonization by 1101. In the generations that followed, the cult of Knud Lavard was promoted first by the saint's brother, King Erik Emune, and later by Erik's son, (King) Svend Grathe, and Knud's own son King Valdemar. Through Valdemar's efforts, St Knud Lavard was recognized by Pope Alexander III in 1169 (Westman 1954, 7, Nilsson 1998, 29). These circumstances were hardly unknown in Sweden at the time of Eric Jedvardsson's death. It seems more than likely that the earliest initiative for a cult of St Eric in Sweden came from the slain king's son, Knut Ericsson, who came to the throne of Sweden in 1167. Carlsson (1944) is convinced that Eric Jedvardsson's remains were translated before 1196, the year that Knut Ericsson died and was succeeded on the throne by Sverker Karlsson. Certainly no member of the Sverker dynasty would have any interest in promoting the veneration of a rival (Carlsson 1944, 105). Interestingly, an inspection of the relics in the shrine of St Eric, carried out in 1946, revealed information that could support Carlsson's hypothesis. The examination of the bones in the reliquary showed them (with the exception of one bone belonging to another individual) to be the remains of an apparently healthy male in his forties. Many of the bones showed damage, clearly sustained just before or just after death, that was consistent with the description of the saint's martyrdom. Of particular interest is the fact that many of the bones, including the skull, show signs of having been scraped with a sharp-edged object. These likely indicate that the bones were treated in order to remove adhering decomposed tissue. This would in turn suggest that the bones were taken up from their grave within a relatively short time after death, perhaps within one or two decades (Ingelmark and Bygdén 1954; see also Kumlien 1967, 24). The entry for St Eric's day in the Vallentuna calendar from 1198 (see above) suggests that the translation of the saint's remains ought to have occurred before that year, and Carlsson's point that this is unlikely to have taken place under Sverker Karlsson must also carry weight.

A number of scholars, including Carlsson, have suggested that there is another piece of evidence regarding the early history of the cult of St Eric. This is a letter from Pope Alexander III (r. 1159–81) to 'K,' the

king of the Svear and the Götar, together with the archbishop of Uppsala and the jarl Guttorm. The year of the letter is uncertain, but 1171, 1172, and 1180 are apparently all possibilities, though Carlsson suggests that it was written in either 1171 or 1172 (see Carlsson 1938, Ahnlund 1948, Jönsson 1991). In this letter, the pope addresses a number of actual and potential lapses in good Christian practice among the Swedes, especially the Götar (the inhabitants of the southern part of the kingdom). In particular, the pope notes that it has come to his attention that certain Swedes are venerating as a saint a man who was killed while drunk. He condemns this veneration and insists that it cease immediately. Although the letter makes no mention of the name of the false saint, Carlsson, along with many other scholars, considers that the pope's prohibition can only refer to St Eric. Indeed, he sees it as evidence that the cult of St Eric was well established by the early 1170s (Carlsson 1938, see especially 90–104, 128). Other scholars have taken a different view. Nils Ahnlund (1948, 1954) suggests that there are other, more likely candidates, the most likely of which is Knud Magnussen (d. 1157). Like King St Knud and St Knud Lavard, Knud Magnussen was one of the many descendants of King Svend Estridsen (d. 1074). His mother appears to have married King Sverker the Elder of Sweden after the death of her first husband. Knut is said to have spent considerable time in Sverker's presence, eventually marrying the daughter of one of one of Sverker's daughters by an earlier marriage. It is of particular interest in this context that Knut is said to have been murdered at a feast where he was host, an episode depicted both by Saxo and in *Knytlinga saga*. According to Ahnlund, it is crucial to note that the pope directs his criticism towards practices occurring in Götaland, rather than in more northern parts of Sweden. The province of Östergötland (Eastern Götaland) in particular was the Sverker dynasty's centre of power. Thus, it is far more likely that a cult associated with this dynasty would become established in this region, than one associated with the Sverker family's most bitter rivals. While the Danish church seems to have managed to suppress an apparent popular devotion to Knud Magnussen by the time of the papal letter, Ahnlund suggests that the close connections between the Sverkera and this branch of Danish royalty had led to some degree of popular devotion to Knut in Östergötland (Ahnlund 1948, 303–11). Unlike Carlsson and others, then, Ahnlund does not regard Alexander III's famous letter as evidence of an early cult of St Eric Jedvardsson. Rather, he suggests, the cult of St Eric retained a local character, confined almost exclusively to the region nearest Uppsala, at least until the time of the miracle collection attributed to Israel Erlandsson, dating from the later thirteenth century.

The Rise of a Diocese

While the dynastic ambitions of King Knut Ericsson and his descendents are undoubtedly one of the motivations for promoting the cult of St Eric from an early date, they are unlikely to be the only motivation. Without the involvement and approval of the church, a place in the liturgical calendar was unthinkable. It would appear, then, that the cult of the martyred king also had something to offer the leaders of the new archdiocese of Uppsala. Gallén (1976) argues for the existence of an early cathedral chapter at Old Uppsala, consisting of a community of Benedictine monks of English origin, even before the establishment of the archdiocese in 1164. Based on the statement in the legend of St Eric that the king brought clergy to Old Uppsala, Gallén attributes the foundation of this chapter to St Eric (7–9). He also suggests that the Vallentuna calendar shows evidence of specifically English and Benedictine influence (10–13).⁴ As further evidence of the English Benedictine origins of the cathedral chapter at Old Uppsala, Gallén notes that the earliest parts of the offices, and especially the *vita* of St Eric were clearly composed according to English models. ‘This cathedral chapter has without doubt been a center for the cult of St Eric, just as the Benedictine monastery at Odense was for the cult of St. Knud, and the monastery at Ringsted for the cult of Knud Lavard’ (Gallén 1976, 20).

While the Benedictine canons postulated by Gallén might well have venerated King St Eric as their early benefactor, the archdiocese of Uppsala, once it was established, had a great deal more to gain from promoting the cult of the martyred king. Sweden was the last of the three Scandinavian kingdoms to be granted an archdiocese of its own, following Denmark (Lund 1103) and Norway (Niðaróss/Trondheim 1152 or 1153). The new archdiocese of Niðaróss had a particular advantage, in that its patron saint, the martyred King St Olaf, had been the object of popular and official devotion for at least a century. The popularity of the cult of St Olaf made Niðaróss the most important centre of pilgrimage in the Nordic region, which certainly brought both spiritual and economic advantages to the archdiocese. There is considerable documentation from later in the period that the ecclesiastical leaders in Uppsala actively promoted the cult of St Eric as a means of attracting pilgrims to their own city, rather than letting them be diverted to the Norwegian archdiocese (see Lundegårdh 1997). It also seems reasonable, though, that the need to find a patron saint of their own must have motivated the leading clergy of Uppsala from an early point. Carlsson (1944) makes the important point that

Uppsala was not only new as an archdiocese, but even as a church province at all, in comparison with several other Swedish sees. Although Niðaróss, with its established cult of St Olaf, might be seen as Uppsala's main competition, the diocese of Strängnäs on the southern shore of Lake Mälaren had two early and popular martyrs of its own, St Botvid and St Eskil (see Carlsson 1944, 128–9). It might be added that Skara, the oldest Swedish diocese, also had its own early saint, St Helena of Skövde. Undoubtedly the archdiocese was as much in need of a saintly patron to confer legitimacy as any monarch or ruling dynasty. Thus, even if the documentation is scanty, there is reason to believe that the interests of the archdiocese and those of King Knut Ericsson coincided and contributed to the early establishment of a cult of St Eric.

Dynastic Issues of the Thirteenth Century

If the cult of St Eric arose out of political and ecclesiastical concerns of the later twelfth century, similar concerns certainly led to its renewed importance beginning in the middle of the thirteenth century. As noted above, the Swedish monarchy was essentially shared by two rival factions, the Sverker dynasty and the Eric dynasty, for over a century. By the middle of the thirteenth century, however, both of these dynasties were extinct, at least in the male line. During the reign of Eric Ericsson (1234–50), the last king of the Eric dynasty, Birger Jarl wielded considerable power in Sweden as ‘jarl,’ a kind of second-in-command to the king. Birger managed to consolidate his power further by marrying the king's sister, Ingeborg. When Eric Ericsson died without issue in 1250, Birger successfully promoted Valdemar, his son with Ingeborg Ericsdotter, as the most legitimate heir to the Swedish throne. In this context, the fact that Valdemar was a descendant on his mother's side of the dynasty founded by the ‘Holy King Eric’ became an important means of legitimizing his rule (see Kumlien 1967, 24, Lundegårdh 1997, 123). It is interesting to note that the name Eric begins to appear among Birger Jarl's descendants at around this time. For example, one of the sons of Valdemar's younger brother and successor, Magnus Ladulås, was named Eric. This suggests a conscious effort to emphasize the genealogical connection between the descendants of Birger Jarl and their predecessors on the Swedish throne.

Moving a Diocesan Seat in the Thirteenth Century

Ecclesiastical concerns lie behind another motivation for the relaunching of the cult of St Eric in the middle of the thirteenth century. Although the legend of St Eric relates that he met his death in Östra Aros, after having heard Mass there at the Church of the Holy Trinity, his remains came to be interred in the cathedral at Old Uppsala, as befits a saintly king. Although the twelfth-century stone church in Old Uppsala was clearly a large and imposing structure, it suffered a devastating fire sometime before August of 1245 (Carlsson 1944, 10). Because of the damage, the nave and transept arms of the church were eventually torn down, and only the central tower and chancel remained standing (see Bonnier 1987, 267–8). The initial reaction to the fire seems to have been an effort to rebuild the cathedral, but it appears that the appropriateness of the site itself was called into question before long. By 1258 Pope Alexander III had charged the bishop of Västerås with the duty of overseeing the transfer of the archdiocese from Uppsala to a more fitting location (Carlsson 1944, 11). Communications between the pope and the cathedral chapter of Uppsala during this period seem to indicate that the clerics attached to the cathedral found Uppsala to be too far off the beaten track to attract visitors from beyond the immediate neighbourhood (Carlsson 1944, 14). Östra Aros was a trading centre and assembly site, with better access to waterways than the ancient religious centre of Uppsala. Kjell Kumlien has suggested that the cult of St Eric itself, as it developed during the thirteenth century, became a motivating factor for relocating the archdiocese (Kumlien 1967, 30). As the cult's popularity grew, it became increasingly important for the saint's relics to be housed in a more central and heavily trafficked location. Just as the cult of King St Eric could be used to confer legitimacy on the rule of a dynasty, however, it could also be used to give spiritual authority to a decision based largely on practical, worldly concerns.

It has also been argued that the development and promotion of the cult of St Eric in Uppsala was at least in part a response on the part of the leading clerics of the archdiocese to the popularity of the cult of the Norwegian royal martyr, St Olaf. According to Ingrid Lundegårdh, the leaders of Uppsala were determined to provide Swedish pilgrims with an alternative to Niðaróss, which had become established as the most popular shrine in the Nordic region. By promoting a saint of their own, they hoped to attract pilgrims, with the economic and spiritual benefits they brought with them, to their own metropolitan

centre. Lundegårdh also suggests that the cult of St Eric was initially intended to displace the veneration of St Olaf in the northern Swedish provinces of Hälsingland, Ångermanland, and Medelpad, which although they were under the ecclesiastical authority of Uppsala, paid a tax or tribute, the *Olavsskatt*, to Niðaróss. When the cult of St Eric proved ineffective in this matter, the prelates of Uppsala shifted their focus, and instead tried to establish Uppsala as an alternate centre for the cult of St Olaf, allowing them to claim the *Olavsskatt* for their own cathedral (Lundegårdh 1997).

The church at Uppsala was dedicated to St Lawrence, like the cathedral at Lund and many other churches throughout the Nordic region. Although King Eric Jedvardsson was buried in this church, he did not immediately become one of its titular saints. Charters and papal communications issued on behalf of the cathedral up to the middle of the thirteenth century name only St Lawrence as patron. By 1268, however, St Eric has begun to be named as a co-patron to St Lawrence (Lundegårdh 1997, 118–19; see also Bonnier 1987, 130, note 49). The addition of St Eric to the cathedral's list of patrons might be seen as a means of providing a spiritual link between the old and new sites of the archdiocese of Uppsala. As the site of the martyrdom of St Eric, Östra Aros could claim at least as strong a connection as Old Uppsala to the saint who was emerging as a patron of the Swedish monarchy, if not of the nation as a whole. The fact that the new cathedral was said to have been built on the site of the Church of the Holy Trinity is also significant. It appears that an attempt was made to associate the new cathedral as closely as possible with the legend of St Eric by building it precisely on the location where the holy king heard his last Mass. One of the miracles attributed to the saint, recounted in the legend but not numbered in the collection, recounts how an old blind woman regained her sight by touching the martyr's wounds and then her own eyes. This first miracle occurred within steps of the battlefield in Östra Aros where St Eric was killed. It has been noted that there is no evidence of a specific cult of St Eric in Östra Aros before the transfer of the archdiocese comes under discussion (Lundegårdh 1997, 118–21). Unfortunately, the paucity of documentation from this period makes it difficult to draw conclusions about what actually happened. According to the *vita*, as noted above, the present cathedral was built on the site of the Church of the Holy Trinity where St Eric heard his last Mass. The present day Church of the Holy Trinity, then as now the parish church for this part of the town, is a few yards to the east of the cathedral and dates from the same period as the larger church (Bonnier 1987, 29). Assuming that the legend in its present form actually predates the transfer of the archdiocese, it is clear that the

choice of Östra Aros, rather than another location such as Sigtuna (an early ecclesiastical centre in Uppland), represents the increasing importance of the cult of Sweden's own royal saint.

Establishing a National Cult

It has frequently been noted that the early cult of St Eric seems to have been a local one centred in Uppland, especially in the area closest to Old Uppsala and Östra Aros. This trend can still be noted in the collection of his miracles dating from the later thirteenth and earlier fourteenth centuries. Although a handful of miracles are associated with Hälsingland and Jämtland (the northern portion of the archdiocese) and one with Dalarna (the northern portion of the neighbouring diocese of Västerås), the northern shore of Lake Mälaren seems to form a boundary for the cult in this period (see Ahnlund 1954, 123). While it seems clear that the development of the cult in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is closely linked to the interests of the archdiocese and of the two ruling dynasties that claimed the saint as a progenitor, it begins to take on an increasingly national character and set of meanings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Among the important meanings that come to be attached to St Eric is an association with the foundation of law and justice, an idea that can be derived directly from the *vita*. For example, the prologue of the Law of Uppland, ratified by King Birger Magnusson (grandson of Birger Jarl) in 1296 states: 'In this law we follow our fathers, St Eric, Birger Jarl and King Magnus' (*Upplandslagen* 7; Ahnlund 1954, 133). As Ahnlund notes, the function of the holy king as a founder of laws is one that King St Eric shares with King St Olaf, and it is clearly one of the more important meanings of the cult for the populace at large. 'People became increasingly accustomed to viewing St Eric as the exalted founder of current law, in the sense of all good, old, recorded justice. This view became so widespread during the end of the Middle Ages that the national law and the term "St Eric's Law" became practically synonymous' (Ahnlund 1954, 134). Another passage in the *vita* establishes St Eric as the epitome of the just monarch, an example for all kings to follow. When the king's subjects offer him the portion of the fines that traditionally belong to the royal treasury, he tells them to keep what is theirs, that their descendants may someday need these funds. In the national law code issued in the 1350s by King Magnus Ericsson, the last king of Birger Jarl's male line, a passage in the laws pertaining to the king establishes the content of the oath to

be sworn by a newly elected king. He is to swear his oath in the name of God, the Virgin Mary, St Eric, and all the saints whose relics he touches with his hand. As Ahnlund notes, this passage codifies what appears to have been a growing perception of St Eric as a national patron saint for Sweden (1954, 135).⁵ During the later Middle Ages, as various factions struggled for control of the contested Swedish throne, this tradition could become a powerful weapon against monarchs or would-be monarchs who failed to live up to its model.

The Rise of the Kalmar Union, the Image of Eric, and the Cult of St George

Sadly for Magnus Ericsson, a range of political and economic problems during his reign led to his being deposed and replaced on the throne by Albrekt of Mecklenburg, the son of Magnus's sister. This event could be seen as the beginning of a process that would move Sweden away from independent status and towards membership in the Kalmar Union, which placed Norway, Denmark, and Sweden under the common rule of the Danish monarch. Among the powerful members of the Swedish nobility there were factions that supported the Kalmar Union, and others that violently opposed it.

By the 1430s, one anti-Union faction, led by Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson, gained in influence and power to the extent of presenting armed resistance. According to Allan Etzler (1931), this is the point at which the cult of St Eric begins to take on a truly national character.

During the 1430s the cult of St Eric came to acquire a truly living meaning for the Swedish people as a whole. At this point it burst out of the clerical and local bounds within which it had previously been confined, and for a few short years it became the focus of the nation's spiritual and political life. The national unifying and revolt that resulted from Engelbrekt's appearance on the scene looked as it were into the earlier history of Sweden in search of a firm center around which to develop, and St Eric became that center. For the Swedish people, he came to be seen not only as a holy man and ecclesiastical saint, but also as the figure of a living monarch from a now-lost golden age, when everything that they now longed and fought for was reality. (1931, xlvii)

Etzler contends that St Eric maintained his status as a national saint, recognized by nobles and burghers as well as by the common man, for only a short time after the death of Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson. Among the anti-Union factions of the nobility, St George soon became the patron of choice for the struggle against Danish domination. Indeed, Etzler argues, when Karl Knutsson (Bonde), who had been Captain of the Realm during Engelbrekt's time, came to power, he had good reason to focus on saints other than St Eric. Given Karl Knutsson's fondness for the pomp and ceremony associated with royal power, a king remembered for his refusal to tax his subjects might not be his fondest ideal (see Etzler 1931, xlvii–xlviii). Nonetheless, as Etzler and other scholars have noted, Karl Knutsson was aware of the potency of the name and image of St Eric, and not least of his symbolic importance as a dynastic ancestor who could confer legitimacy on the reign of a monarch. Sometime around 1452, a new introduction was composed for the *Erikskrönika* (Eric's Chronicle), a rhymed chronicle focusing on the deeds of the members of the Folkung dynasty (the descendents of Birger Jarl), apparently composed during the minority of King Magnus Ericsson in the early fourteenth century. In the newly composed passage it is noted that King Eric Ericsson, the last direct descendent of the male line of St Eric to rule Sweden, had three sisters, one of whom, 'Märetha,' married Sir Nils of Tofta. The son of this union is then said to be the grandfather of Karl Ulfsson, who in his turn was the maternal grandfather of Karl Knutsson (see Tunberg 1923, 363; Etzler 1931, xxlviii, note 105; *Äldre svenska frälsesläkter*, 1:84–8). As Tunberg notes, this genealogy is false, since the name of Karl Knutsson's grandfather is known to have been Abjörn Sixtensson, not Abjörn Nilsson (363). By inserting this spurious claim of descent from a descendent of St Eric, Karl Knutsson or his supporters were following the example of Birger Jarl and his descendents. Whether or not Karl Knutsson engaged in any kind of personal devotion to St Eric, he was well aware of the symbolic value of a connection to the saint, and not above trying to exploit it to confer legitimacy on his own reign as king of Sweden. In addition to St Eric's already-noted function of legitimizing earlier dynasties, it might also be noted that he, like Karl Knutsson, reigned during a period when Danish monarchs also claimed the right to the Swedish throne. Thus, an association with St Eric, no matter how spurious, may have served symbolically to incorporate Karl Knutsson into a line of heroic Swedish kings ruling in defiance of the illegitimate claims of greedy Danish pretenders. Perhaps, too, he sought to protect himself from being seen as an opportunistic upstart, making his own power grab when he had the chance.

Although Karl Knutsson is known to have shown far greater

devotion to St George than to St Eric (Etzler 1931; Svanberg and Qwarnström 1998), he was not above creating a connection to the saintly king when it suited his purposes. While Karl's successor as regent, Sten Sture the Elder, shared his devotion to St George, he also understood the importance of St Eric as a national symbol and as a patron saint of the kingdom of Sweden. Without question, the most famous and imposing of all the sculptures known from medieval Swedish churches is the St George grouping in the Great Church of Stockholm, commissioned by Sten Sture in commemoration of his victory over the Danes in the battle of Brunkeberg in 1471.⁶ St George was apparently not the only saint to whom Sten Sture felt he owed thanks for his victory, however. In fact, there is evidence that the great retable of St Eric at Uppsala Cathedral, destroyed in the great fire that ravaged the church at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was commissioned by Sten Sture and his wife, Ingeborg Axelsdotter Tott, after the battle of Brunkeberg. On this altarpiece, scenes from the legend and martyrdom of St Eric were depicted in painting and sculptures. As Tryggve Lundén (1983) notes, St Eric was considered to have contributed to the victory through his intercession on behalf of the Swedes, and the retable was certainly intended as a gesture of thanksgiving (Lundén 1983, 319, 324). Perhaps it might be taken as further evidence of Sten Sture's regard for St Eric that certain coins issued during Sten's reign bear an inscription that includes St Eric's name (see Thordeman 1954, 201).

Although Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson, Karl Knutsson, and Sten Sture the Elder showed awareness of the importance of St Eric as a national symbol, they were not alone in trying to exploit his symbolic importance. Individuals and factions favouring the Kalmar Union that united Sweden, Norway, and Denmark under a single monarch also invoked the name and image of St Eric to support their cause. As Anna Lidén (1999) points out, even before the beginning of the Kalmar Union, portrayals of St Eric together with St Olaf of Norway and/or St Knud of Denmark could serve to emphasize the unity of the Nordic region in the eyes of the church. Likewise, when Magnus Ericsson and his queen, Blanche of Namur, endowed an altar at Niðaróss Cathedral in honour of St Olaf and King St Eric in their testament of 1347, it was certainly a reference to the fact that Magnus ruled over both Sweden and Norway (the latter an inheritance from his maternal grandfather) (see Lidén 1999, 255). During the period of the Kalmar Union, the image of St Eric was sometimes depicted together with those of St Olaf and St Knud, clearly suggesting that the political union of the Nordic kingdoms was understood by some to have saintly support. Interestingly, these depictions are relatively rare within the borders of medieval Sweden. Bengt Thordeman (1954) notes eight such

depictions from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the Reformation. These include two depictions from Södermanland, two from Östergötland, one from Öland, two from Hälsingland, and one from Gotland (which by this time was under Danish political control, though it remained part of the Swedish diocese of Linköping). Interestingly, from the same period, the Danish province of Skåne (now the southernmost province of Sweden) had eight depictions of the three Nordic royal saints together (see Thordeman 1954, 218–24). The importance of St Eric as a symbolic ancestor for kings of Sweden was also not lost on Union monarchs. When the Union regent Margrethe designated her heir after the death of her son, Olaf, she chose her grand-nephew Bugislav, a son of the duke of Pomerania. At this point, the young man took the name Erik (Schück 2003, 683; Olesen 2003, 724). While this name is certainly well represented in the Danish royal family from an early point, it is also likely that Queen Margrethe and her heir were aware of the importance of St Eric as a symbol of legitimate kingship in Sweden.

The Enduring National Symbolism of Eric

Although Etzler (1931) and others have contended that St Eric's currency as a national patron and symbol declined after the early fifteenth century, it is notable that the royal saint retains a certain value as a national symbol, even though he is no longer the object of a cult. For example, although the current Swedish capitol of Stockholm was not founded until more than a century after the death of Eric Jedvardsson, his image adorns the city's arms. Bengt Thordeman (1954) has argued that the crowned male head that has been part of Stockholm's coat of arms since the fourteenth century was not originally a portrayal of St Eric, but rather a more general symbol of royal authority. By the seventeenth century, however, Johannes Messenius states in his *Stockholm Chronicle* that Birger Jarl himself had chosen St Eric's image as the coat of arms for his newly founded city (Thordeman 1954, 201–2). It might, perhaps, be argued that the image of St Eric in this context might have conferred a degree of legitimacy on the gradual shift of secular power from Uppsala to Stockholm that occurred during the Middle Ages. Much as the cult of St Eric helped the archdiocese of Uppsala to relocate from the relatively isolated rural site of Old Uppsala to the bustling market town of Östra Aros, so too, if St Eric was understood as a patron of Stockholm, it might have eased the way for the transfer of the royal

power centre and main residence to this strategically important site. While the execution of the image in the city arms has changed over time, its basic content remains the same, a frontal view of a crowned, beardless, male face. The present-day version of the Stockholm coat of arms is based on a medieval wooden sculpture of a crowned, beardless, male saint from the parish church of Roslagsbro in Uppland. This sculpture no longer has the attributes that might allow the saint to be positively identified as either St Eric or St Olaf. It has been argued that St Eric is more often portrayed as clean-shaven, while St Olaf is more often bearded. There are exceptions to both tendencies, however. Although tradition dating back to the beginning of the eighteenth century maintains that the sculpture portrays St Eric, it has also frequently been identified with St Olaf and the arguments for that point of view also have merit (Jacobsson 2002, 292–4).

In our own time, the important issue does not seem to be whether or not the model for the face of St Eric in the Stockholm coat of arms originally represented that saint. Rather, the interesting point is that the name and image of St Eric continue to resonate as national symbols for Sweden and its capital, even more than five centuries after the Protestant Reformation.

The Manuscript and the Translation

The following account of the life and miracles of St Eric appears in the Codex Bildstenianus, currently housed in the Uppsala University Library. Written in Old Swedish in the fifteenth century, it was a translation of an earlier Latin original. The translation is based on the 1828 edition by Israel Erlandsson included in Volume 2 of *Scriptores Rerum Svecicarum Medii Aevi* (270–315).

The Life of St Eric

In the name of God, the origins, life, and good consummation of the illustrious prince and honourable lord St Eric will here shortly be told. He was born in Sweden, of a family of noble kings and well-born knights. When the kingdom was without a king, he was unanimously elected, and at Uppsala was solemnly raised up and crowned. Because of the mildness of his temperament and his honourable life, he was dearly loved by God, the nobility, and all the peasants. When that

holy lord and worshipper of the Holy Trinity came to power, he spent all his time in three ways, until he adorned and completed his life with a glorious martyrdom. Following the example of the holy kings of the Old Testament, he first gave his attention to the building of holy churches, and to the improvement and spreading of the divine services (*divini cultus*); then to governing his people and bidding them to follow law and justice; and lastly he fought for the Holy Faith, and against the enemies of his kingdom, and in this he acquitted himself manfully. First of all he gave his attention to Uppsala Church, that which is now called Old Uppsala, which the earlier kings, his forefathers and kinsmen, had founded, and begun to build. He sent clergy to hold the divine services there, and he completed the church with a great and costly project. Then he travelled around his kingdom to proclaim law and justice to his people. He did not waver to the right for the sake of affection or gifts, nor to the left for the sake of hatred or fear, but went straight along that right path that leads to heaven. He brought reconciliation to those in conflict, rescued those who were oppressed by the powerful, supported the just, drove from his kingdom those who were cruel and unjust, and judged everyone fairly according to the law. His people loved him for these, and all his other virtues, and wished with one will to give him that third portion of the kingdom's fines, which, according to the custom of the country, belong to the national treasury, to be used for the good of the country. To those who made him that offer he answered: 'I will be content with that which is mine; hold ye freely what is yours, for it may be that those who come after you have greater need of it.' Oh, what a just ruler, so seldom seen in power, to be content with what he has! He did not look greedily upon the possessions of his subjects.

According to what is proper, each man whose task it is to govern and judge others should first look to himself, and force the desires of the body to yield to the wisdom of the soul, and always turn the striving of his soul towards God. As the apostle Paul said of himself: 'I punish my body and bring it under control.'⁷ Our holy king was assiduous in his godly prayers and great fasts and vigils, compassionate towards those in distress, and kind in his alms to the poor. He constantly scourged his body with hair shirts, wearing one even when he was slain and tormented, and that hair shirt is kept to this day at Uppsala Cathedral, for it was drenched with his holy blood. We see also how he dealt with the secret enemy that each man carries in his bosom, for when, as he so often did, he abstained from the marriage bed because of fasts or holy days, he would often, even in winter, take cold baths in secret, using cold to drive out the body's illicit heat. When the holy church was finished and the kingdom was stable, he assembled his crusade for the Holy Faith and against its

enemies. He took with him St Henrik, who was bishop of Uppsala, and went to Finland, which in that time was heathen and did great harm to Sweden. St Eric ordered the Finns to accept the Christian faith, and to make peace with him. When none of them were willing to do so, he went to battle against them, and defeated them with the sword, avenging the blood of the Christian men that they had so long and so often spilled. When he had achieved his great victory he gave himself over to prayers to God, falling on his knees with tears and lamentations, for he had always had a mild and compassionate heart. One of his good men asked him why he wept so, when he ought rather to rejoice in the great victory he had won over the enemies of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Christian Faith. He answered him thus: 'I rejoice, and most highly praise God for granting us victory, but I mourn that so many souls have been lost today, which might have achieved eternal life if they had been willing to accept the Christian Faith.' Thus he followed the example of God's dear friend Moses, who was the mildest and gentlest of men. For the sake of God's justice he had the idol worshippers slain, avenging the insults and wrongs against God, and then, in his charity, he prayed to God for the souls of his people. Then St Eric gathered the people who remained unslain in the country, and to promote the cause of Christianity he left behind the noble St Henrik, who was later to be crowned a martyr there. He sent priests, and set up other Christians, and the divine services, and then he went home to Sweden with the full honour of victory.

In the tenth year of his reign, it happened that this good man was tested with adversity, as a good seed becomes all the more fruitful when it is pushed down into the earth. For the old enemy of mankind raised an enemy against him, by the name of Magnus, son of the king of Denmark. Magnus claimed the kingdom for himself on the basis of his mother's lineage, but against the custom of the country, which did not allow foreign men to rule and govern in Sweden. He enticed to himself a powerful man in the kingdom, and other evil and unjust men, whom he tempted with gifts and great promises, and they gathered and took an oath upon the king's wounding and death. In secret, unknown to the king and without raising his suspicions, they gathered an army and went against him with a great force to Östra Aros, which is now called Uppsala. On that day it was the Feast of Ascension, the day this worthy man followed Our Lord to the honour of heaven. On this day the holy king heard the hours and the Mass in the Church of the Holy Trinity, on the mount that was then called Our Lord's Mount, where the cathedral now stands. One of his servants came to tell him that his enemies had arrived at the city, and bade him gather his weapons and go to meet them. He answered thus: 'Let me nonetheless attend these great services to their end. I pray to God

that if anything is left of his services, that we may hear the rest of it in another place.' And after these words he commended his fate to God, crossed himself, and donned battle gear with his men. Though they were few in number, they met their enemies manfully, and the enemy came against him in battle, sending most of his troops directly at the king. They beat him to the ground, hewing and stabbing him with wound after wound, tormenting him until he was half dead, and then they ignobly cut off his noble head. Thus he went victoriously to everlasting peace, joyfully exchanging the kingdom of this world for the kingdom of heaven. And this miracle occurred, the first of his miracles, that in the place where his blood first touched the ground, a flowing spring welled up, which even now proclaims his holy martyrdom.

When the enemies had gone on their way, and the king's body still lay in the same place where he had been beheaded, a few of the king's men, who remained unslain, carried his body to the nearby house of a poor widow. There lived a woman who had long been blind, and when she touched his holy body with her hands, and rubbed them over her eyes, she at once regained her clear sight, and she praised God and his holy martyr St Eric. Another episode of his holy life, which we do not tell now, is written elsewhere. It tells how his cathedral was moved from Old Uppsala to New Uppsala, where he now rests, and of the wondrous miracles that God wrought and still does today for the sake of his holy intercession and prayers. The holy King St Eric suffered death in the year of Our Lord 1160, on the 18th day of May, when Alexander III was the pope in Rome [r. 1159–81], Our Lord Jesus Christ ruling in heaven, on whom be praise, honour, and glory without end. Amen.

The Miracles of St Eric, King and Martyr

Here are told some of the miracles that God has wrought for St Eric's holy sake, first of a farmer who went mad.

1. A farmer from Måby, in Husaby [now known as Husby-Ärlinghundra] parish in Attundaland, was called Oluf. He was of good repute and virtuous company, but he became quite wild and lost his senses through God's mysterious judgment, so that his friends had to guard him carefully lest he do harm to himself or others. One day he managed to escape from their hands and ran to the woods, and when he saw that people ran after him, wanting to recapture him, he took his knife and stabbed himself in the breast around the heart, five terrible mortal wounds. When his son, and many others with him,

arrived and saw this pitiful sight, he asked his friends for their counsel. They advised him to make a vow to St Eric on his father's behalf, and this he did, calling piously on St Eric, and God immediately looked mercifully on this wretched man. For as he lay there without breathing, like a dead man, there appeared to him a lordly man in royal clothes, with a crown on his head and a royal spire in his hands. This man touched the wounds with his right thumb and said: 'Son, put thy faith in God, and remember what has been promised on thy behalf, and when you are healed, make your way to me.' And with these words the man recovered his full senses, and sent for the priest and made his confession. And in a short time, all his wounds were healed, and he was recovered both in body and mind. Oluf himself attested and told of this miracle at the shrine of St Eric on the next following feast of St Lars [Lawrence, 10 August].

2. How a Franciscan regained his health

A friar of the order of St Francis, born in Gotland and named Brother Rodger, had a grave illness, so that he could not move his legs or feet, and was like a cripple, unable to move from his bed unless he was carried in and out by his brothers. The friar complained greatly over his illness, because he was a heavy burden to his brothers, and he prayed constantly to God and holy men to be healed. It happened in the Rogation Days [the three days preceding the Ascension], when St Eric's relics were carried in solemn procession from Uppsala Cathedral to Östra Aros, as is the custom, that the ailing friar heard the songs of the clerics. He asked his brothers what it was, and they told him that the shrine of St Eric was being carried around the priory. He devoted himself with all his heart to godly prayers to St Eric, and prayed to God for St Eric's holy intercession: if he might regain his health, if God, for the sake of St Eric's holy prayers, would make him whole again, then he would honour the noble martyr St Eric with devoted service. And in that same moment he felt relief from all his pains and illness, and gripped his cane, and tried to rise from his bed by himself. And he was not only comforted but when he felt himself altogether well and healthy, he cast away his cane and stood upright, walking in and out with his brothers, loudly praising God and thanking the holy noble lord St Eric. This miracle was carefully checked and tested in the presence of Brother Nils and Brother Thomas, guardian and custodian, in Aros Priory, and many others. And Brother Rodger told and proclaimed and preached of the miracle himself on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin [8 September].

3. How a mute priest regained his voice

A priest by the name of Ingemunder, Sir Rawast's chaplain in Närtuna, lost his voice on Easter Day, and was quite unable to speak, and when

he had remained so for a time, he prepared himself to be forever mute. As St Eric's Day [18 May] approached, and Sir Ragwast once again heard of new miracles accomplished by St Eric, he advised Sir Ingemunder to call steadily and piously on God's mercy, for the sake of St Eric's prayers and intercession, and told him to prepare himself to perform the Mass of St Eric on St Eric's day, if God would grant him enough voice to recite a single Mass. And although he could comfort himself but little, since he could produce neither voice nor word, he still did as his master advised him, and calling upon St Eric's help, he clothed himself for the Mass and walked to the altar. And as he began to recite the *Confiteor*, he regained his voice, so that those who stood nearby heard and understood him well. And when he felt that God had shown him this mercy, he offered up his voice, and sang with clear tone the Masses of St Eric, though before he could neither recite nor speak. God, who is always wondrous and glorious in His holiness, also thus renews earlier miracles, he who once loosened tongues and opened the mouth of Zechariah, Our Lord's prophet, who also had been mute.⁸

4. How a mad farmer regained his senses

A farmer named Anders, from Årsta in Vaksala parish was working together with other men of the parish bringing stones for a building on the grounds of the priest's estate. Suddenly, by the mysterious judgment of God, he broke into a rage and shouted terribly, so that his friends had to tie him up, as one possessed by the devil. They then made a vow to St Eric on his behalf, and carried him to the church, and he was immediately saved from the devil, and healed through St Eric's intercession and holy prayers. He proclaimed this miracle on St Eric's Day, as did all those who were nearby and witnessed this miracle.

5. About a servant who fell into a well

A servant boy who was named Anders, who served Sir Ingwald of Soland [Sollentuna], by the mysterious judgment of God so lost his wits that when he was sent to fetch water for the kitchen, he threw himself down into the well. Other boys ran up and pulled him out, lifeless, and carried him into a house, where he lay for two days and a night, like a dead man, utterly without sense or movement. Then his master Ingwald went and looked pityingly at this poor lad. He made a promise to St Eric on his behalf, and asked for God's mercy for the sake of St Eric's prayers. With that the boy began to move, and quickly regained his senses and opened his eyes and asked to be shriven. And when he had confessed, he was immediately saved from the devil and from all sickness. When we, who investigated this miracle as best we could, asked him what had happened during the

two days he lay as a dead man, he replied that a flock of black birds, like ravens, had flown at him and tried to kill him. He himself publicly proclaimed this miracle to those who were near him, in the hearing of many clerics, monks, and peasants.

6. How a lad regained his life

In Logö [Lovö] a boy of seven years was running and playing with the other boys, when he was seized with a sudden illness, so that he had to be carried lifeless to his father's home. He lay there for three days, without movement or sense, to the great sorrow and grief of his mother and his relations. When after a time his father returned home, having been away on business, he went sorrowfully (as may be understood) to the Franciscans in Stockholm, asking them to advise him what to do. They replied that he should with all haste and humility turn to St Eric, and make him a vow. This he did, and as soon as he had made the vow, the boy was healed for the sake of St Eric, by the power of Him who restored to the mother her only son, whom he raised from the dead, as the Holy Scripture tells us.⁹

7. About a crippled girl

A girl from Hälsingland who had been crippled, so that she was unable to walk, and was forced to creep piteously, was made whole and healthy by St Eric's prayers, for her parents promised her to St Eric, and people saw her walking upright and healthy on St Lawrence's Day.

8. About a child born dead

God Almighty also gave life to a girl child who had been born dead, and he saved the mother from the pains of death for the sake of St Eric's prayers and intercession, and many of us saw that same girl healthy and hearty.

9. About a Franciscan

A brother of the Order of St Francis, who was custodian in Sweden, a good and godly man known to many, had such severe pain in all his members that he was unable to move from his bed. He called piously upon that glorious martyr St Eric, and with that was healed, and freed from his grievous pains, as he himself proclaimed for the people when he preached on St Eric's Day.

10. About a dead girl

A young girl, who appeared to be dead and was laid on the floor to be shrouded as is done with dead bodies, regained her life when her parents piously called on St Eric. Her parents proclaimed this miracle publicly for all.

11. About a dead woman

The ringing had begun for the soul of a dead woman, according to custom, and the parish priest was called to bless the body. Her friends called fervently on St Eric and she regained her life for his sake, as that same priest, and others who were nearby, informed us.

13. About a paralyzed man

A man was sorely captured by the devil, and half of his body was so paralyzed that he could not move it at all. Those who were nearby called fervently upon God and St Eric for his sake, and by St Eric's holy intercession he was fully healed, as he himself and all those who were nearby solemnly attested.

14. About one who drowned

One who recently was drowned and carried dead into a man's house regained his life for the sake of St Eric. So too has God, for the sake of St Eric's intercession, saved houses and villages from a great fire, as those who witnessed it told us. And this took place at Ekeby.

15. About a storm and wind

In the year of Our Lord 1304 Brother Peter of the Order of Preachers [the Dominicans], prior over the province of Dacia, had held the chapter meeting with his brothers in Skänninge, and intended to travel over Vättern to Skara. When he was near Alvastra, there came a great storm and wind, so that he was compelled to remain there for a long time. Then he called on St Eric's help and instantly, as they had not dared to hope, the weather grew calm and mild, by the grace and mercy of God, who commands the weather and the seas, and they obey him. And so he was able to cross the lake with good weather and without difficulty, though it seemed impossible to the monks and others who were there. And this friar said so to his brothers.

17. How a stillborn child came alive

In the year of Our Lord 1305 Dame Ramborg, the wife of Sir Folke of Fånö, was in mortal danger as she lay in childbed. She vowed that she would walk barefoot to Uppsala from Flötesund and that she would offer to St Eric a pound of wax if she could be delivered of the child without mortal danger and continue to live. And with that, she delivered the child, which was dead and showed no signs of life for many hours. And the mother grieved sorely over this. Still, as she had seen the miracle and mercy on herself, she put her faith all the more in God's and St Eric's mercy and help and called fervently on God and St Eric to give life to this newborn but dead body, so that the child might receive baptism. She made a new vow, so that she might receive this mercy from God and St Eric and as soon as she had done

so, the stillborn body began to breathe and show signs of life and was baptized and named Birgitta. She lived well for many years, and her mother fulfilled that which she had promised for herself and her child. The forenamed Lady Ramborg told this to me, Brother Israel.

18. Another similar miracle

A woman was suffering in childbirth so that she was quite lifeless when the good women who attended her made a vow on her behalf to St Eric. They asked that the woman might keep her life and be delivered of her child, and when this was done, the woman gave birth to a dead daughter, and lay dead herself for four hours. When the women saw that the mother began to regain breath and life, they found an even greater faith in God and St Eric, and for the sake of kindness they made a further vow to St Eric, asking that he who had given life to the mother also grant it to her child, long enough that she might receive baptism. And when they had done so, God's mercy quickly helped and God, who gave life and spirit to Adam the first father when he was shaped from earth,¹⁰ also gave spirit and soul to the newly born dead child. And when the women saw life and movement in the child, who so recently had certainly been dead, they baptized her according to the customs and faith of the Holy Church, and called her Helena. And we who witnessed this miracle saw her three months later, healthy and well. This miracle was investigated and proven at Aros in the Franciscan priory, in the presence of ministers and officials, the abbess of Sko, the dean, the archdeacon Sir Jacob, and many other clerics and laymen, and two good women attested to the whole, having witnessed the miracle and seen how it all occurred.

19. About a raging woman

In the village of Helgesta in Hacksta parish, by God's mysterious judgment, a woman became so enraged that she bit her entire tongue to pieces with her own teeth, and tried many times to kill herself with her own hands. Her friends bound her hands and feet, and put a gag in her mouth so that she could not harm herself or others, or destroy her tongue with her teeth. Then they called their parish priest to ask what remedy they should take for this pitiful case. The parish priest thought of how St Eric had, by the particular mercy of God, helped to cure woes and sickness that many people who were possessed by a devil displayed. He advised them to call fervently on St Eric, and he made the saint a promise on her behalf, and this they did. As soon as they had made the promise on her behalf, God's mercy came mildly upon her. For the same woman who before could not sleep at all nodded off and fell asleep, and when she awoke and opened her eyes, her appearance was lovelier and better, and it was apparent that the

devil that had caused her such torment and severe pain had left her. Previously her aspect had been so hideous that no one could doubt that she was possessed by a devil. When the priest and the others who were nearby saw this conversion and the good signs in her, they wondered and rejoiced, though they did not dare to loose her hands, which before eight men could hardly keep hold of when the sickness was upon her. Then the aforementioned parish priest went to her and said, 'Daughter, you are healed from your sickness; praise Almighty God who saved you for the sake of St Eric's prayers, and to let us understand that you are healed, lift your eyes to heaven.' And she did as the priest asked, and gave the sign that she was saved. She was still bound hand and foot as before, and had the gag in her mouth, and when they saw this, they unbound her hands. Then the priest spoke to her again, for he wanted to be more certain of this miracle. 'Daughter, put your hands together, and lift them both and your eyes to God in heaven and thank him for your health.' She did so at once, and looked up through the window towards God who had helped her. Then they released her feet and took the gag from her mouth, and looked into her mouth and saw a great miracle, that her tongue was now whole and undamaged, though before it had been so wounded and bloody that the blood had run from it. Neither wound nor scar could be seen. And the woman was entirely healed and restored to sense and reason as she had been in the beginning, except that she became dumb and speechless for a good half year, by that mysterious will and judgment of God which we cannot know, except that he wanted to show even more honour to St Eric through her. When St Eric's Day arrived, the woman and her friends went fervently to St Eric and prayed humbly to him, that as God had restored her sense and reason and healed her tongue, that he might also, for the sake of St Eric's prayers, restore her speech. As soon as she did this, the bonds on her tongue were loosened, and she spoke freely, thanking and praising God who so mercifully helped her out of her many and great torments, for the sake of St Eric's prayers. This miracle was publicly examined and proclaimed at the following synod in Uppsala Cathedral.

20. How Sir Magnus was cured

The nobly born Sir Magnus, son of Johannes Ängel, was travelling to Uppsala from Stockholm on the day of the Nativity of the Virgin, when he grew so ill that he had to lie in bed for three days at his estate, Näs. He spoke in a daze and did not know what he said, and the three following days, when he regained sense and reason, he was unable to speak, and during all of these three days he could neither eat nor drink. Now, when his friends could see no hope for his health and they began to prepare for his burial and funeral, his sister's son

Brother Israel and his chaplain Sir Håkon and his page Knut all vowed that they would walk barefoot from Flötesund to Uppsala if mighty God, for the sake of St Eric, would grant the sick man, who appeared quite lifeless, such mercy that he might regain sufficient speech to make his confession. The sick man fell asleep at once, and he awoke a short time later, on the seventh day since he had become so sick. They gave him something to drink, and when he had swallowed he at once regained his voice, so that those who stood near him could hear what he said. The following day, a Saturday, he had himself taken to his chapel to hear the Mass of Our Lady, and after that he was better able to speak, though not as well as he wanted to. The day after, a Sunday, he went to Ulltuna, and on Monday, the day of the Holy Cross [probably the Feast of the Exaltation, 13–14 September], he made his pilgrimage to Uppsala, and the aforementioned Brother Israel and Sir Håkon and Knut kept their vow as they had promised, and Sir Magnus disembarked from his ship at the Franciscans' brick house, which was far from the church. Though he was so weak that people thought he could only manage to walk a short distance, with the help of others he walked all the way, barefoot and unaided, to St Eric's shrine, and over twenty lads, likewise barefoot, followed him. There he regained his speech, and in return he offered St Eric a canopy. This miracle happened in the year of Our Lord 1293.

21. Of a man who had a great headache

Sir Martin, the parish priest in Lövsta, saw how one of his parishioners, Olaf, was taken by a great headache from Easter to St Olaf's Day [King St Olaf, 29 July, or St Olof Skötkonung, 30 July]. He vowed to make a pilgrimage to St Eric and St Olaf if they would pray to God on his behalf that he might be healed. When he fell asleep on St Olaf's night, it seemed to him that a glorious man appeared and said, 'Now that you are healed, go to St Eric and offer him a silver coin.' When he awakened, he felt himself to be completely healed, and he piously fulfilled the promise he had made. This miracle occurred in the year of Our Lord 1294.

22. Another example

An ox belonging to the same Sir Martin fell to the ground, so that people thought he was dead, and could see no signs of life in him except that he blinked one eye a little. The farmhands wanted to stab and flay the ox so that it could be eaten, so that it would be slaughtered and not dead of sickness. But Sir Martin told them to leave it alone. 'If he lives, I will give him to St Eric.' The farmhands stopped, and the ox began to move strongly, and recovered a short time thereafter, and was offered to St Eric on the following St Lawrence's Day.

23. How a man cut his own throat

An enraged man in Våla parish became so crazed that he cut his own throat. His friends and relatives came and saw this hideous and pitiful sight and carried him to the worthy Sir Folke, the archbishop in Uppsala, asking him to advise them what to do with the poor man's body. The good man was saddened, charitable as he always was, and asked if there was any life at all in the wretched man. They answered that there was the faintest sign, for he still breathed through the wound. The worthy lord advised them to promise him to St Eric, that God might have mercy on him who was at his end of his life, for the sake of St Eric's prayers and intercession. The bishop went at once to his prayers, calling on God and St Eric for him, and promising that if this poor man could keep his life, that he would sing a holy Mass for St Eric. Once he had done that, the man regained his sense and reason again, and within a short time he was completely healed. And he came, healed, to Uppsala Cathedral on St Eric's Day, and he bore a true sign of that miracle, for the scar was around his throat like a red thread, in praise of God and his holy martyr St Eric.

24. How a boy was healed

In the same year it happened in Jämtland that a boy, four or five years old, was running around barefoot in the summer. A sharp stick punctured the sole of his foot, all the way to the bone, causing the foot and leg to swell and the flesh to rot, even to the degree that it fell away, baring bone and sinews. It appeared that the boy would die as no cure seemed likely. His mother promised if her son were healed she would make a pilgrimage to Uppsala. The boy was cured and regained his health completely, and the mother fulfilled her promise and came to Uppsala on Maundy Thursday, and offered a leg of silver in memory of these miracles. And these two miracles were proclaimed in the cathedral on St Eric's Day, in the presence of King Magnus and his queen, and many nobles and peasants in the year of Our Lord 1272. On the same day there came a certain man to Uppsala, bringing with him two feet made of wax, which he offered to St Eric's shrine, saying that he had been cured of a great swelling of the foot.

25. About a sick demon

Israel Erlandsson attended school in Linköping and there contracted the severe illness that is called quartant [a fever coming every fourth day], and it had lasted for three and a half years when he left Östergötland to go to his friends. He came to Sir Folke, his uncle, who at that time was archdeacon and later became archbishop in Uppsala. This worthy and godly man paid particular honour and veneration to St Eric. He told his nephew Deacon Israel Erlandsson to go to Old Uppsala, where St Eric's relics were at that time, and there to offer a

wax candle in honour of St Eric. He also gave him an antiphon with the verse and collect, which he was to recite often in honour of St Eric. The aforementioned deacon did as he was told, and within a few days he was quite cured, though he had been so ill before, and had nearly wasted away because of his severe illness.

26. About King Birger

The noble lord and prince King Birger, son of King Magnus, had a long and hard illness so that he lost both flesh and skin, and his sinews held his bones together, and he had no strength in any of his members. He suffered from this sickness for a year so that it was feared that he might die at any moment. One night he suffered such a severe attack that those who watched and waited upon him thought that he would surely die. The king's steward and tutor, Sir Carl Tyske, the foremost among those who watched over the king, saw that there was no earthly help, and he piously commended himself to God's mercy, praying and calling upon the kings St Eric and St Olaf, and on St Nicholas the confessor, and he promised pilgrimage and offerings for the sake of the sick king's health and healing. He cast lots to learn to whom he should make his pilgrimage and his offering, to St Eric, St Olaf, or St Nicholas. Three times the lot fell on St Eric. When Sir Carl saw that the lot fell on St Eric, he turned sincerely to St Eric and promised rich offerings and a pilgrimage to St Eric on the king's behalf. And the king was soon cured of the attacks and palsies he had suffered, and within a short time he was free from all pain and sickness, to the astonishment of all. Sir Carl and two knights fulfilled the pledge that he had made for the king, and walked from Stockholm to Uppsala on St Eric's Day, bearing with them costly offerings sent by the king. They bore public witness of the miracle, praising God and St Eric. At the same time, Sir Carl proclaimed that St Eric's intercession had caused him to be cured of a severe pain in his eye, which had rendered him nearly blind until he called upon St Eric, asking for his help and promising him offerings.

27. How a certain lady saved her child from danger

A noble and pious woman, Dame Helga, the wife of Sir Rörik Birgersson, told a chaste friar that her children were destroyed in the womb so that they did not quicken, and this had happened to her twice. The third time she was with child she feared that it would go as ill as before. She prayed sincerely to St Eric, asking him to pray to God on her behalf so that she, in health, could give birth to a living child, and she promised St Eric a golden infant if God would have mercy on her. And when her term was up she gave birth to two living daughters, and joyfully fulfilled her promise.

28. How a house was saved from fire

In the year of Our Lord 1294, around the time of Pentecost, there was a great forest fire near Gotttröra church, and a great wind drove the fire towards the vicarage, which was barely a stone's throw from the woods. Nicolaus, who was the parish priest, called sincerely upon St Eric, asking him to save the church's houses from the flames, since no human could help. At once the winds shifted and drove the flames away from the houses and the yard was unscathed, as Sir Nicolaus proclaimed at the synod. At the same time, a great part of Sir Linward's house in Norby near Uppsala was burned in a fire, when Dame Margareta, Sir Lindward's wife, began to call on St Eric, asking for his help in their great need and wretchedness. A great part of the farm remained unburned and was saved, a great miracle wrought by St Eric, as Dame Margareta attested.

29. About a sick boy

It happened in Villberga parish in the village of Grillby that a boy named Sigwaster was sick and near to death. His relative, the priest of that parish, was nearby. The boy's parents lifted him up in their hands and saw no signs of life in him, nor any breath, sense, movement, or warmth. They made a promise to St Eric on his behalf, and he regained his breath and was healed as before.

30. How a dead man was seen to revive.

A man in Aros, in the house of Sir Wilken the merchant, was severely sick unto death and unable to speak. He lay like a dead man with his eyes closed, without breath, sense, or movement for over a day. Those who were nearby thought that he was dead, and sent for his heirs, so that they might care for the body and see to his last rites, as is proper. His host, Sir Wilken, made a promise to St Eric on his behalf, and when they went into the dead man's room in the morning, they found him alive though they had left him for dead. He sat upright in bed, speaking to people and thanking God, who had called him back from the gate of death for the sake of St Eric's holy prayers and intercession. This miracle was proclaimed and witnessed by the same Sir Wilken the merchant, and others who were present, in Uppsala Cathedral, before the clergy and congregation.

31. About a raging man

A man in Vaksala parish lost his mind and speech, and became so enraged that he tried to kill his own wife, and caused her a grievous wound. His friends bound him and conveyed him to St Eric's Church, and when he had lain there a while, God restored his sense and reason, though he remained mute. He remained there, praying to God and St Eric, making noise and emitting whimpers and cries as the

dumb are wont to do. On the Eve of St John the Baptist, as the *Te Deum* was being sung in the church, he regained his voice, and could speak well and clearly as we who were present heard. The next day, St John's Day [24 June], he proclaimed this miracle himself, witnessed by the congregation there assembled.

32. How a woman became blind

A woman from Dalarna, named Lina, had the custom of doing her chores on Sunday, and paid no more attention to that day than any other. For her sins, she became quite blind and could see nothing at all. She visited many holy places, hoping to regain her sight. Finally, having heard much about St Eric's miracles, she came to Uppsala and stayed there a while, and as she was not cured, she went away again. When she was some distance on her way, she heard in her sleep that she should return to Uppsala. This was on the Feast of St Lawrence, the patron of Uppsala Cathedral, and it was the twentieth year that this poor woman had been blind. She lay before the relics of St Eric on the night of St Lawrence weeping and mourning and praying earnestly to St Eric. It was the custom that each St Lawrence's Day the shrine of St Eric, in which his relics lay, was carried in procession before the Mass. The woman knelt by the church doors as the shrine was borne through them, and she called sincerely on St Eric with tears in her eyes, and a little blood even sprang from them. Suddenly she shouted and said that she could see clearly all that was before her, most of all the shrine of St Eric. All the congregation assembled there saw this miracle, that this woman who had been blind regained her sight. And they all praised God and St Eric for performing this miracle in their presence. And we with our college, with several clerics and chaste men, investigated this miracle as thoroughly as we could, and everyone attested that it was true.

33. About a deacon

In the year of Our Lord 1277, God's mercy did this miracle in honour of St Eric on Easter Day. A deacon from Hälsingland had been sick from St Martin's Day [11 November] to that hour, and there seemed no cure for him. His master advised him to have himself carried to Uppsala Cathedral, and this he did. When he came in through the doors, he regained his health as before.

34. Another

Moreover for the sake of St Eric's prayers and intercession a woman from Giresta regained her voice after having been speechless and mute for over two years.

35. Of St Lawrence

Hemming of Ekby lay without speech for five days, and no one could see any signs of life in him. In a vision, he saw St Lawrence approach him, wearing a grey tabard. He said to the sick man: 'You shall soon be healed.' And with that the sick man began to speak, as all could hear. And within a short time he came to Uppsala and donated a horse in thanks for his health.

36. Of St Lawrence

Katherine of Irsta parish had a withered foot, and part of her leg as well. The flesh was gone so that the bone was covered only by skin. She had had this sickness for three years and was unable to work. She promised to make a pilgrimage and an offering to St Lawrence in Uppsala, and there she was healed. In commemoration of this miracle she donated a foot and leg made of wax on St Lawrence's Day.

37. Of one saved from a grievous illness

In the year of Our Lord 1299 Anders of Solna lay languishing in his bed for twelve weeks. When he had promised himself and his offering to St Eric, he was healed, and he came to Uppsala with his offering, proclaiming the mercy that God and St Eric had shown him.

38. Another

In the same year, Saxe, the bailiff of Stockholm Castle, promised St Eric a candle made of a pound of wax, if God, for the sake of St Eric's intercession, would restore his health after the great sickness he had suffered. He was healed and he came to Uppsala with his offering, proclaiming the mercy that God and St Eric had shown him.

39. A Miracle

Siderius of Vaksala parish said in the same year that God, for the sake of St Eric's prayers and intercession, had saved him from severe pain in his eyes, and restored his vision.

40. About a lunatic

Olof of Huddunge said of himself that when he was seven years old he lost his mind, and was mad for a year and a half, until his father and friends, who sorrowed greatly over his condition, asked St Eric to pray to God on his behalf. They promised that if Olof regained his sense and reason that he would donate a silver coin to St Eric every year as long as he lived. Once this promise was made, the boy quickly regained his reason and sense. After that Olof used to put aside a silver coin every year, until he could purchase a cow, and he donated the cow that he had thus purchased in the year of Our Lord 1300. He said that he would continue to do so as long as he lived.

41. How God gave a harvest because of St Eric's prayers

The farmers in Bälinge, Pickaby, and Åkerby met to discuss how they might honour God, so that he would grant them a harvest that would feed and nourish them. For several years there had been a famine, and many people had suffered from starvation. The farmers agreed that each would go to his own parish church, and they would ask God for mercy, and they would offer St Eric a gilded silver ear of grain if God, for the sake of his holy prayers and intercession, would grant them good weather and harvest. When they had done this, they received the rain that the fields needed, and good weather, and a good harvest.

42. About a sick woman

Sir Ragvald Puke says that his wife Katrin lay sick and languishing for twelve weeks, looking as people do when they are about to give up the ghost. They bound together her thumbs, so that her hands would be together when she died, and they saw no signs that she was alive. Then Sir Ragvald promised that if St Eric would pray to God on her behalf, he would make a pilgrimage to St Eric and donate a canopy. She quickly recovered, and Sir Ragvald fulfilled what he had promised.

43. How a priest fell from his horse

A priest called Sir Martin, born in Öland, was parish priest in Ebohärad [Edebo]. He was riding home to his parish from the synod in Uppsala in the year 1293, and as he rode, his horse stumbled, and he fell headfirst and struck his head so hard against the root of a tree that the woolen hat he wore fell to pieces. After a while, he stood up with difficulty, and went to the nearest parish priest, asking for lodging. As a result of his fall he was dizzy and disoriented, and he lay for seven days unable to eat. The priest in whose home he was staying pitied him, and was very much afraid that he would die in his house, unable to reach his own home. This priest made a promise to God and St Eric on behalf of the sick man, that if God, for the sake of St Eric's prayers, would restore his health, that this same Sir Martin would donate a head of wax weighing a pound, and he would make a pilgrimage to Uppsala from the room in which he now lay, and would carry his offering himself. And as soon as the priest had made this promise for him, the ailing Sir Martin stood up, fully cured, and that same evening he sat at the table with the priest, eating and drinking. He joyfully fulfilled the vow made on his behalf, and they both swore an oath that this was true.

45. How a boy was healed

In the year of Our Lord 1306 a boy named Bengt, the son of Olof the Dane and Ingegärd in the village of Ekeby in Vendel parish, was often

ill and seemed to suffer from gas, and his health was unstable. He finally swelled up from his private parts up to his navel, grew as black as a piece of coal, and it appeared that he could not hold on, but rather must give up the ghost. In the midst of this sorrow, the mother went to church on Sunday, on the eve of St Olaf [probably 28 July]. She could not stay at home, so great was her sorrow, and she could not bear to see her son die. She thought, when she left home, that she would never again see her son alive. Sir Hans, the parish priest of Old Uppsala, came to the church and saw the woman weeping and mourning in her everyday clothes. He spoke with her and asked what was the matter and why she was weeping so. She told him, and said that it seemed all the worse to her, since that same year she had lost four sons and two daughters. He comforted her and bade her trust in St Eric and ask him to help her in her great sorrow and need. He said also that she should make a vow on behalf of her son, and then she went away, like a woman half dead. This poor woman did as he advised her: she promised that if her son might live and be healed he would make a pilgrimage each year to St Eric's grave in Old Uppsala, and there have a Mass sung for St Eric. When she had made this promise, and the Mass was over, she went back home. When she came into the yard her son came running towards her, and she cried out, thinking that he was about to die. The mother was astonished to see her son so quickly healed. At first she thought that he must be mad and had lost his senses. She picked him up and carried him inside, asking how he had been healed so quickly. She lifted up his clothes and examined all the places that had been swollen before – and now they were all healed. The swelling had gone out of them, though the skin was still wrinkled. The mother asked her son what had happened, and he answered her: 'Just now, while you were away, I received a sweet sleep, and I saw a man in my sleep, dressed in white. He stroked me where I had pain, and at once I could feel how the swelling and the pain went away.' The boy, who was six years old, could tell us no more about the white-clad man. However, we believe that it was St Eric who appeared to the boy in the same moment that the boy's mother called on him and made the vow on behalf of her son. Then the mother rejoiced greatly, and guarded the boy carefully so that no harm could come to him. Within three days, without any kind of salve or medicine, the black and wrinkled skin was as white and smooth as the rest of his body. The woman and her son came in health to Old Uppsala on St Lawrence's Day, and had a solemn Mass sung for St Eric. Everything that is written here was told by the aforementioned Ingegård to us, Archbishop Nicholas of Uppsala, in the presence of many listeners, when we consecrated Vendel church in the year of Our Lord 1310. This miracle occurred in Vendel parish ...

47. How a boy regained his life

Torsten, the smith in Faringö [Svartsjölandet], was driving home from the meadows with a load of hay when his three-year-old son ran out to meet him, to embrace his father. The boy fell in front of the wagon, and the father drove on with his load, unaware of his son. Then the father heard the cry that the child made, and wondered what it was. The wheel had gone over the child. He held back the yoke and looked back, and saw that behind his load, the child lay crushed and lifeless. The father was beside himself, and took the child in his arms and carried him into the house, mourning greatly, as might be expected. Then he remembered to call upon St Eric, since he had heard that the saint often helped those who were in need. He made a vow to St Eric, asking that his child might regain his life and be healed by God through St Eric's prayers and intercession. As soon as he had made his vow, the boy came to life, and was healed in all his limbs, and after this he lived for a long time. This miracle occurred in the year of Our Lord 1308. The boy's father told it to me, Brother Israel, and many others, proclaiming that it was true.

48. How Archbishop Nils became sick

In the year of Our Lord 1310, on St Eric's Eve [17 May], Archbishop Nils left the church after compline, on his way home. He suddenly began to tremble and he shivered through the night until it was time for the sunrise, and he began to fear that he would never leave Uppsala alive. As he despaired of ever leaving his bed, he made a vow to St Eric that he would honour him with a lesson after matins and vespers each day, if he recovered sufficiently to celebrate the hours on St Eric's Day, as was his custom. At once he fell into a deep sleep, such that, before the bell rang three, he was well enough to perform the high Mass himself, along with the other hours that day, fulfilling all the obligations of his office. At this moment, he became completely free of his ague, which did not return to him. He preached about this himself to all those who assembled for the Feast of St Eric, praising God and St Eric. Some time later, in the year 1311, it happened that the same archbishop was staying at his estate, Åker [Västeråker?], near Uppsala, and did not intend to come into Uppsala to celebrate the offices of St Eric on his day. He became gravely ill, and he recognized this as right recompense for his sins, for not going to Uppsala himself to celebrate the hours of St Eric as he should. He had himself conveyed to Uppsala as quickly as he could, and the illness soon left him.

49. How a man was cured of swellings

Sir Johannes, a man from Film parish, travelled to Uppsala, and on the way he became very ill, and began to swell up over his whole

body so that no one expected him to live. He was carried into the home of Olof in Fulreda, and there they made a promise to St Eric on his behalf, and he soon recovered.

50. Of a fire

At Dame Margareta's estate in Wiksta parish, a wildfire was raging in a large granary, threatening the barn and other buildings nearby, so that she was afraid that the fire would burn up the entire farm, and nothing could be saved. She called sincerely upon St Eric, promising him a mark of silver if he would help her in her great need, and the flames were immediately driven away from the buildings, as though some power compelled them, and they were unable to harm any of the buildings. This happened in 1310.

51. Another similar miracle

On St Eric's night in the same year at Ladunge in Knivsta parish, there was a great fire. A man named Ödger lived in the middle of the village, and he called upon St Eric and promised him an offering if he would help him, so that his house would remain unburned. The fire was terrible, and houses burned on both sides, but Ödger's house remained unscathed, as Sir Emund, parish priest in Odensala, witnessed and attested before the archbishop and many others.

52. How a maiden was cured

In the same year, on the Thursday before St Eric's Day, a noble maiden, Christin, daughter of Harald Elg in Halkvi [Hallkved], lay gravely ill. She had been unable to take any food for ten days. Sensing that she was near to death, they called her cousin Brother Israel, the prior in Sigtuna, who was staying with the archbishop in Funbo. He came and spoke with her, and she asked him to return in the morning to hear her confession and give her communion and write her testament. And so he returned early the next morning, and as he was on his way in to the sick woman, he met a couple of her serving maids, who were weeping sorely. They said to the prior: 'Since you left yesterday, at nine o' clock, she has spoken but a few words, without any sense or reason.' Then he went over to her bed and tried to see whether she could speak any words, and the maids went along and touched her to see if she could speak, but she neither opened her eyes nor spoke a word, no matter how hard they tried to rouse her. They were all sorely aggrieved, both because she was near to death and because she had not been able to make proper preparations for her soul, or made her testament. Brother Israel went out into the courtyard, greatly mourning that she should leave the world without confessing or making her testament, and he greatly regretted that he had not shriven her or administered last rites when he had seen her

the day before. He wanted to go on his way as soon as he had said Mass, and he called his aunt, Dame Ragnel, wife of Sir Bengt Bosson, and Sir Styrger the parish priest, and Sir Jacob the chaplain and instructed them in how and where the body should be buried and other details pertaining to the preparation of the body. Someone then advised them to make a promise to St Eric on the girl's behalf, that if she recovered, she would make a pilgrimage to St Eric and offer him a canopy. Dame Ragnel and Brother Israel agreed to this, and as he was on his way to celebrate Mass a page came running out to him, and asked him to go into the maiden's room. He both rejoiced and wondered at the speed of this mercy. When he arrived at her side, she said in a clear voice: 'I feel better now, and I would like to eat something. With God's help I will soon grow strong.' He said: 'Make your confession and take communion, and then you will have something to eat.' The friar was afraid that the illness would return just as quickly, and that she would die suddenly, as the dying sometimes ask for food just before they die. The friar said: 'I want to say a Mass to St Eric first, and then hear your confession and other matters having to do with the needs of your soul.' When the Mass was finished, she made her confession and took Communion and made her testament, and then took some food, and in a short time she was cured. This same maiden declared that she had had the fever known as *quatrain* for a year and a half, and as soon as she had made a vow to St Eric, she was freed from her ague.

NOTES

- 1 Some of these sources are also much later than the events they describe, such as the *Heimskringla* (c. 1220s) and *Knytlinga saga* (c. 1260–70, according to Westman 1954, 89n85).
- 2 Israel, who was a cousin of Birger Persson ('lagman' of Uppland, father of St Birgitta, and one of the authors of the Uppland law), later became prior of the Dominicans in Sigtuna, and finally bishop of Västerås.
- 3 After the church at Old Uppsala was destroyed by a fire in the thirteenth century, the archdiocese, along with the name 'Uppsala,' was transferred to Östra Aros.
- 4 Gallén's findings are disputed by Helander (2001, 60–86), who

instead suggests that the canons were Cistercian monks, and that the chapter was founded by Stephen, the first archbishop of Uppsala, who was a Cistercian from Alvastra (the monastery founded by Sverker (the Elder?) in Östergötland. Other scholars have supported Gallén's idea that the early canons followed the Benedictine rule, including Dahlbäck (1993, 143) and Jacobsson (2002, 44), who acknowledges Helander's argument, but nonetheless favours Gallén's.

- 5 Etzler (1931) places St Eric's emergence as a national patron somewhat later, noting that he first appears as a patron saint of guilds during the fifteenth century (xxiv).
- 6 This sculpture group is presented and illustrated in great detail in Svanberg and Qvarnström 1998.
- 7 I Corinthians 9:27.
- 8 Luke 1:5–23, 59–79.
- 9 Probably Elijah's healing of the boy, 1 Kings 17:17–24.
- 10 Genesis 1:26–7.

PART III

Holy Bishops and Nuns

Pride and Politics in Late-Twelfth-Century Iceland: The Sanctity of Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson

KIRSTEN WOLF

The Icelanders officially converted to Christianity in 999/1000. It is difficult to determine how directly and how deeply they were affected by the Conversion. Their social system was not, it seems, noticeably changed, but the country's inclusion in the Roman Catholic Church necessarily brought the Icelanders into closer contact with European culture. Indeed, the ones who first taught them the *Pater Noster*, the Creed, and the rudiments of Christian dogma were foreigners. The names of a few of these missionary bishops are preserved in Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* and in *Hungrvaka*, and they indicate that the bishops came chiefly from the British Isles and Germany.

During the first three or four decades of Christianity, these foreign missionaries were probably the only ones who provided instruction in the new faith, and thus, it must have been through these men that the Icelanders became acquainted with saints and their legends. Yet the significance of missionaries as transmitters of European learning and literature must not be over-emphasized, because by the mid-eleventh century Iceland also had its own native teachers. The first of these known by name – as well as the first Icelander known to have been ordained as a priest – was Ísleifr Gizurarson (c. 1005–80). He was educated at Herford in Westphalia, Germany, and in 1056 became the first native bishop of Iceland. His estate Skálholt eventually became the episcopal see after his son Gizurr, who succeeded his father as bishop (1082–1118), donated it to the church. It was at Skálholt that Ísleifr organized a school for training boys for the priesthood. Among his pupils was Jón Ögmundarson (1052–1121), who was consecrated bishop of Hólar in 1106 in response to a request by the inhabitants of the northern part of the country for a bishop of their own.

Under Gizurr Ísleifsson, Jón Ögmundarson, and their successors, Christianity became firmly rooted in Iceland, and gradually the church became a powerful national institution. In 1097 the tithe law was introduced, which greatly strengthened the church and gave it a sound financial basis. In the second decade of the twelfth century the Christian Law section preserved in extant manuscripts of *Grágás* was

composed; among other things, the Christian Law gives a list of obligatory feasts and fasts and also provides rules for the founding and maintenance of churches. It further includes the requirement that an inventory of all church property (a *máldagi*) be produced annually. In 1133 the first Icelandic monastery was established at Þingeyrar, and in the course of the same century, religious houses were founded at Munkaþverá (1155), Þykkvibær (1168), Flatey (1172; moved to Helgafell in 1184), and Kirkjubær in Síða (1186). Some of the monasteries later came to serve as centres of literary activity, and the early translations of homiletic and hagiographical material – the earliest Norse literature of which we have record – may well have originated in these communities. The building of churches also increased significantly, as did the number of priests to serve them.¹ According to the count of the churches and priests in the Skálholt diocese undertaken at the initiative of Bishop Páll Jónsson (1195–1211), there were 290 priests and 200 churches around the turn of the thirteenth century (Vésteinsson 2000, 93). No contemporary figures are extant for the Hólar diocese.

When a church was to be consecrated, it was dedicated to God (or Christ) and one or more saints. The choice of the patron saint(s) was in the hands of the bishop, but it is reasonable to suppose that the parishioners had some influence on his decision. The vast majority of churches were, of course, dedicated to the Virgin Mary,² and it is hardly surprising that St Peter was the second most popular saint at least as far as church dedications are concerned.³ From the *máldagar*, it is clear that a church typically owned a copy of the legend of its patron saint as well as a statue of him or her. Dedications, sculptural or painted images, and observance of feast days in local churches were probably the main, if not the only, sources of information about the saints for the majority of Icelanders in the Middle Ages. It has been suggested that the Icelanders were especially receptive to the cult of saints, since the belief in supernatural spirits and creatures so characteristic of the pagan Scandinavian religion was already ingrained in the Icelandic mentality (Hugason 2000, 307).

In 1153 a new archdiocese was created for Norway and the colonies in the Atlantic with a metropolitan in Niðaróss (modern Trondheim).⁴ The great reformer Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson (1161–88) took an active interest in Icelandic affairs and greatly promoted the cult of the recently deceased King Olaf Haraldsson (r. 1015–28; d. 1030) in Iceland and elsewhere.⁵ Archbishop Eysteinn's campaign was largely successful; almost sixty churches were dedicated to St Olaf in Iceland, and he is one of the four saints most often mentioned in the *máldagar* (Hugason 2000, 308; Cormack 1994, 144). However, the composition of two legends of King Olaf Tryggvason (r. 995–1000) – one by the

monk Oddr Snorrason of Þingeyrar and the other by Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1219) of the same monastery – suggests that not all Icelanders fully embraced St Olaf Haraldsson, reflecting, perhaps, caution on the part of at least some Icelanders about Norwegian influence and/or a desire to have a saint of their own.⁶ Olaf Tryggvason must have seemed an obvious candidate, for he was, after all, the one responsible for converting the Icelanders to Christianity. But if the *vitae* by Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson were intended to advance the sanctity of Olaf Tryggvason, they must be said to have been unsuccessful, probably because there were neither reports of miracles attributed to Olaf Tryggvason nor any depositions of his relics. Two requirements for the foundation of a cult were thus lacking, and there is no evidence that he was ever formally venerated as a saint (Cormack 2000, 306–7).

The establishment of the sanctity of Þorlákr Þórhallsson must likely be seen as a direct result of the failed attempt to promote Olaf Tryggvason as Iceland's national saint. By the late twelfth century, several of the other provinces of the Niðaróss diocese had their local saints;⁷ and the fact that Iceland had none appears to have been a source of concern for Icelandic church officials. Such is hinted at in the *vita* of Þorlákr Þórhallsson (*Þorláks saga*), where it is reported that after Þorlákr's death 'many wise men said that either the sanctity of Bishop Þorlákr would be revealed or else it would not be granted in Iceland' (see translation on p. 255). Aside from national pride, financial considerations may also have prompted the desire for a national and, more importantly, native saint, for considerable funds must have left the country annually in the form of vows to foreign saints, especially St Olaf (Guðmundsson 2000, 38).⁸

That the Icelanders should look among their bishops for a saint is hardly surprising, for in this they were merely following in the footsteps of other Europeans, who since the tenth century had promoted saints who had been members of the episcopal or monastic hierarchy, especially those engaged in, or sympathetic to, reform movements.⁹ That the choice should fall upon Þorlákr Þórhallsson is hardly surprising either, for of the bishops available for consideration – six of Skálholt and three of Hólar (not including Brandr Sæmundarson [1163–1201]) – Þorlákr was the only bishop to have advanced a clear agenda of his own and the first to have actively supported the reform policies of the Norwegian archbishops.¹⁰ Moreover, he was probably one of the first celibate clerics, if not the first, in Iceland, and this may well have impressed his contemporaries.

Þorlákr was born in 1133 at Hlíðarendi in Fljótshlíð, the son of Halla Steinadóttir and Þórhallr Þorláksson, both, according to *Þorláks saga*, 'of good family and noble descent' (48).¹¹ Þórhallr had been a

merchant before he became a householder, but apparently he was unsuccessful, and the family was dissolved when Þorlákr was a child. He and his mother moved to Oddi, where Þorlákr was educated by the priest Eyjólfir Sæmundarson (d. 1158), son of the famous Sæmundr Fróði. *Þorláks saga* relates that he was ordained as a deacon in 1148, when he was only fifteen years old, 'because his superiors felt that he took to heart and observed to the utmost the duties required of each of the orders that he took' (50). In the same year, the Skálholt bishop, Magnús Einarsson, died in the fire of Hítardalr along with a great number of other people with the result that the Skálholt diocese was without a bishop for some time. It was probably in response to a subsequent lack of priests in the southern diocese that the Hólar bishop Björn Gilsson undertook a kind of mass-ordination of priests at the Althing. Among those who were ordained on that occasion was Þorlákr, who by then could hardly have been more than eighteen or nineteen years old (Guðmundsson 2000, 27).¹² Þorlákr then became a district priest in a small but profitable monastery, and the saga claims that these revenues enabled him to go abroad and study for six years, first in Paris and later in Lincoln.¹³ Upon his return to Iceland, probably in 1159, Þorlákr stayed with his relatives, who urged him to marry a widow living at the church farm Háfr; but at the last minute he refused. *Þorláks saga* attributes his refusal to a dream in which a man appeared to him and told him that there was another much higher bride in store for him.¹⁴ Instead of establishing a family and becoming a householding priest at Háfr, Þorlákr served as a district priest at the church farm (and later convent) Kirkjubær in Síða.

Six years later, in 1168, a wealthy landowner, Þorkell Geirason (d. 1187) in Þykkvibær in Álftaver, donated his wealth to establish a house of canons on his estate, the first Augustinian monastery in the country. He invited Þorlákr to head the community and became a canon himself in the establishment. Þorlákr assumed the position of prior in the same year and became abbot a few years later.¹⁵

When Þorlákr had been in Þykkvibær for a few years, Bishop Klængr Þorsteinsson of Skálholt became increasingly weak from illness and old age and asked Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson for a replacement. The archbishop gave permission for another bishop to be selected, and at the Althing of 1174 three clerics were nominated: Þorlákr; Abbot Ögmundur Kálfsson of Flatey; and Páll Sölvason, priest in Reykholt. In the end, Bishop Klængr was requested to select one of the three, and he chose Þorlákr. According to *Þorláks saga*, Þorlákr returned to Þykkvibær, hoping that Bishop Klængr would be able to manage the see and the estate until the winter was over, but the old bishop was so infirm and the estate in such financial difficulties that Þorlákr was sent for shortly after Christmas and assumed his duties in Skálholt a

couple of weeks before Easter 1175.

Bishop Klængr died in early 1176, but because of hostilities between the Icelanders and Norwegians on account of unsettled cases of manslaughter and robbery Þorlákr delayed his journey to Norway and did not leave until the summer of 1177. *Þorláks saga* reports that Archbishop Eysteinn received him well but refused to consecrate him without the consent of the young King Magnus (d. 1184) and his father Earl Erlingr (d. 1179),¹⁶ who appear to have been opposed to the consecration.¹⁷ Eventually, Archbishop Eysteinn was able to sway the two monarchs, however, and Þorlákr was consecrated bishop on 2 July 1178. He returned to Iceland a month later.

Þorlákr proved to be a conscientious pastor to his flock and a great disciplinarian. According to *Þorláks saga*, ‘Bishop Þorlákr gave the most love and affection to those priests and clerics who lived virtuously and preserved their orders appropriately, and these he duly valued and gave them good livings as far as the means [of the see] allowed. But the ones who did not change their ways by gentle admonitions he rebuked with moderate words and calm chastisement’ (67). It is also known that he introduced stricter rules on fasting,¹⁸ established the feasts of Sts Ambrose, Cecilia, and Agnes as Holy Days of Obligation, removed two days in Whitsuntide, and added vigils before the feasts of the apostles and St Nicholas.

Þorlákr’s primary area of pastoral care lay, however, in the areas of matrimony and adultery. In 1173 Archbishop Eysteinn had written a letter to the Icelanders, in which he denounced those who led promiscuous lives, and in a later letter, dateable to 1179–81, he again raised the matter of sexual and marital offences, only this time he specifically addressed the lax morals of Jón Loptsson (d. 1197) of the Oddaverjar clan and Gizurr Hallsson (d. 1206) of the Haukdælir clan. Jón, who was ordained as a deacon and ranked as the most powerful chieftain in Iceland in the last decades of the twelfth century, was married but had sons by a number of mistresses. One of these was Ragnheiðr, none other than the sister of Bishop Þorlákr. Gizurr – a cleric, influential chieftain, and a good friend of Þorlákr’s – had four illegitimate children with three women. Þorlákr worked hard to promote the Norwegian archbishop’s marital reforms. *Þorláks saga* reports that not only did he take ‘great pains to keep those people together who were joined in holy matrimony and punished those severely who fell short with fines and penances,’ but also that he ‘broke all those unions which he knew to be unlawfully joined, whether greater or lesser men were involved’ (74–5). The vigour with which he campaigned may be illustrated with an example from *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, which relates that in 1183 the priest of Bær, Högni Þormóðsson, betrothed his daughter Snælaug to Þórðr

Böðvarsson, even though there was a two-fold legal impediment to their matrimony. The saga reports that ‘this marriage was banned by the Bishop St Þorlákr, who was so inspired by faith in God that he went to the Lawrock with his clergy and swore an oath that this marriage contract was against the law of God. He then named witnesses, declaring the union null and void, and excommunicated everyone involved.’¹⁹

It has also been argued that Þorlákr pursued the policy laid down by Archbishop Eysteinn of extending ecclesiastical control over church property, although there is no mention of Þorlákr challenging the right of laymen to own churches on their estates in the *A* redaction of *Þorláks saga*, the oldest *vita* in the vernacular. The only source for Þorlákr’s claim to church property is an interpolation in the so-called *B* and *C* redactions of *Þorláks saga* (see below),²⁰ the *Oddaverja þáttur*, which gives an account of Þorlákr’s public life and especially his disputes with Jón Loptsson, who was the foremost upholder of the laymen’s rights and himself the owner of several churches, and who successfully resisted the demands of Þorlákr. The date of *Oddaverja þáttur* has been disputed, as has the context of its composition, and, accordingly, Þorlákr’s reformist efforts have been questioned. Vésteinsson (2000, 112–23), who has examined the *óáttur* and compared it with the demands put forward a century later by Bishop Árni Þorláksson of Skálholt (1269–98), argues convincingly that it was written considerably later than the events it describes and as a propaganda piece in Bishop Árni’s struggle against secular church owners in the 1270s or 1280s, when Bishop Árni’s main opponents were Jón Loptsson’s descendants in Oddi. He draws attention to the fact that the five extant archiepiscopal letters from Þorlákr’s episcopacy do not mention control over church property and also points out that the author of *Oddaverja þáttur* regarded Þorlákr’s claims as essentially identical to those made by Bishop Árni in the thirteenth century, which seek absolute control. He believes that what Þorlákr attempted to accomplish was no more than ‘to get church-owners to acknowledge that they did not own their churches outright but were only their patrons or caretakers on behalf of God’ (119) and that he was in fact ‘quite successful in establishing *ius patronatus* in Iceland’ (123).

Þorlákr died on 23 December 1193. On his sickbed he gave his coronation ring to his nephew Páll, the illegitimate son of Jón Loptsson and his sister Ragnheiðr, which in *Þorláks saga* is interpreted as a sign that Þorlákr wanted Páll to succeed him (see below, p. 252). Indeed, in 1194 Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson of Hólar chose Páll as bishop, and in 1195 he was consecrated.²¹

Þorlákr had not long been dead before his sanctity was revealed in

dreams. According to his saga, Þorlákr appeared in a dream to a priest in the Hólar diocese in the winter of 1197, the winter Jón Loptsson died. The dream was reported to Bishop Brandr, who wrote to Bishop Páll about the miracles that had occurred, and at the Althing of 1198 formal permission for vows to Þorlákr was given. So many miracles were reported at that very assembly that on 20 July his remains were translated to Skálholt, and in 1237, the anniversary of the translation was made a Holy Day of Obligation.²² At the Althing the following year, 1199, an account of miracles worked through the intercession of Þorlákr was read out and his feast on 23 December established as a Holy Day of Obligation. It was, however, not until eight centuries later, on 14 January 1984, that the pope formally approved Bishop Páll's decision and declared Þorlákr the patron saint of Iceland (Guðmundsson 2000, 38).

Þorlákr's success was enormous. The miracle collections included in his saga testify to his extraordinary popularity in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and that veneration of him continued during the following centuries is clear from the *máldagar*, annals, and sagas.²³ From *Páls saga*, it is known that Bishop Páll dedicated a chapel to his uncle in the tower he arranged to have built for the bells he had purchased for the Skálholt cathedral (of which Þorlákr was a patron along with St Peter), and also that he used revenue from vows to Þorlákr to commission a costly shrine for Þorlákr's relics.²⁴ From the annals, it is known that Þorlákr's remains were translated again in 1229 and 1292. The former was during the episcopacy of Magnús Gizurarson (1216–37), the latter during that of Árni Þorláksson and probably because of renovations in the cathedral. And from the *máldagar*, it is known that numerous churches were dedicated to him. Cormack (1994, 159–62), who has examined the veneration of saints in Iceland until 1400, lists him as patron of no fewer than eighteen churches (including half-churches) and co-patron of thirty-three. The first church to be dedicated to Þorlákr was Hof in Hvolhreppur, a half-church; the dedication dates from 1198. In addition, Þorlákr was co-patron of two altars (at Tröllatunga and the monastery of Viðey [established 1225/6]). Thirty-four Icelandic churches are said to have owned images of him, nine are reported to have owned a copy of his legend, in Latin or the vernacular, or an office, and three churches (Skálholt Cathedral, Flatey in Skjálfandi, and Papafjörður) owned relics of him.²⁵ Indeed, by the end of the fourteenth century, Þorlákr was the fourth most popular saint judging from the number of churches of which he was patron or in which he was represented by an image, legend, or relic.

As noted above, a collection of miracles performed through the intercession of Þorlákr was read out at the Althing in 1199. A part of

this collection, which was compiled probably at Skálholt, survives in a very old manuscript, AM 645 4to, from around 1220. The work, which is commonly referred to as the ‘Ancient Miracle Collection of Þorlákr’ (*Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna*) or ‘Bishop Páll’s Miracle Collection’ (*Jarteinabók Páls byskups*), tells of forty-six miracles in chronological order from the period shortly after the translation of Þorlákr’s relics until March 1200 (a few were added after the report was read at the Althing). The beginning of the work is lost; it is possible that it contained an account of Þorlákr’s death, the first miracles, the translation of his remains, and possibly a *vita*.

There is also a fragment (LatI) of a Latin *vita* of Þorlákr in AM 386 4to I from around 1200.²⁶ The fragment consists of three separate leaves and is thought to be from the oldest life of Þorlákr, on which the *lectiones* for recitation on his feasts were based. Indeed, it is believed to have been the source for not only the oldest liturgical texts about Þorlákr but also for the oldest vernacular *vita* of Þorlákr and may have been composed around the same time as the *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna* (Benediktsson 1969, 107). From a reference in the first leaf to ‘the previous book’ (342) in which it was supposedly told of the promotion of Þorlákr ‘to the highest ecclesiastical rank’ (342), it is clear that the work was divided into two parts or books, and from its contents it seems that it also contained an introductory chapter about the former bishops of Skálholt. To this *vita*, accounts of miracles, probably from the *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna*, were added (as evident from the second and third leaves, which contain an account of four miracles that took place before the translation of Þorlákr’s relics) and most likely an account of the translation itself.

In addition to this Latin *vita*, a number of fragments of liturgical texts have survived.²⁷ The most extensive of these is a fragment (LatII) in AM 386 4to II from the first half of the thirteenth century. It tells of the election of Þorlákr as bishop, gives a brief summary of his youth and early career, and mentions some miracles that occurred with his help while he was at Þykkvibær. It appears to have been read on the Mass for Þorlákr in the winter (23 December). In this connection, it may be noted that Þorlákr’s feast in the winter is included as *simplex* in the *Breviarium Nidrosiense* (1529; LatIV), which has six *lectiones* that appear to be an extract from LatII. Three other fragments contain *lectiones* for recitation on the Mass for Þorlákr in the summer (20 July). Two of the fragments (LatIII 1 and 2) are found in AM 670e 4to (Árni Magnusson’s copy of a now-lost leaf dating from 1440), which contain parts of the seventh and eighth *lectiones* and the end of the seventh *lectio* and all of the eighth and ninth *lectiones*, respectively. The third fragment (LatIII 3), which dates from the latter half of the fourteenth century and is thought to have originated in the diocese of

Hólar, is in Iceland's National Archive (Þjóðskjalasafn). It begins at the end of the fourth *lectio* and closes at the end of the sixth *lectio*. The fourth *lectio* is almost identical with LatIII 2, but the division into *lectiones* is different. The texts of the fifth and sixth *lectiones* in LatIII 3 are considerably longer than the corresponding texts in LatIII 2, but, as pointed out by Benediktsson (1969, 100), the text of LatIII 2 must have been based on the same text as that of LatIII 3, for, if the many omissions in LatIII 2 are disregarded, what is left is almost identical with LatIII 3.²⁸

Altogether, the three fragments contain accounts of four miracles, of which only the fourth is preserved in its entirety. All the miracles took place in 1198 and all have parallels in the vernacular saga, especially *Þorláks saga B*. There are also similarities between the account of the translation in the Latin fragments and that in the vernacular saga. Indeed, the resemblance is so striking that Benediktsson (1969, 106) concludes that both texts must be derived ultimately from a common source, which gave an account of the translation of Þorlákr's remains and contained a collection of miracles, and that the core of this account is most likely the *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna*.²⁹ Finally, there is a rhymed office for the feast of Þorlákr dating from the fourteenth century in AM 241a fol,³⁰ and a non-liturgical Latin verse prayer to Þorlákr has been preserved in AM 382 4to from the mid-fourteenth century.³¹

The vernacular life of Þorlákr exists in three main versions, designated *Þorláks saga A*, *B* and *C*. The primary manuscript of *Þorláks saga A*, Stock. Perg. fol. no. 5, dates from around 1360 but a fragment from the mid-thirteenth century is extant in AM 383 4to I. The oldest vernacular version of *Þorláks saga* was most likely compiled at Skálholt around 1200, that is, shortly after the translation of Þorlákr's remains and before Bishop Páll's death in 1211. Accordingly, there is approximately 150 years' difference between the age of the saga and the oldest complete manuscript (*Biskupa sögur II*, xxii). In terms of structure, the saga is quite typical of the legend of a confessor. It opens with an account of Þorlákr's *vita* (a description of his childhood, education, and early career, his election as bishop, his consecration in Norway, and his episcopacy, where emphasis is placed on his piety and skills as an administrator); then follows an account of his death and burial (*mors*) and the translation of his remains (*translatio*); finally there is an account of miracles that took place after his death (*miracula*), though in this version, these miracle chapters are scarcely more than a list. Also in terms of content, the saga fits squarely into the genre of saints' lives in that the author does not dwell on details and presents Þorlákr more as a type than an individual. The author of the saga clearly regards Þorlákr as nothing but a saintly and

benevolent man and does not dwell on Þorlákr's public life and his conflicts with Jón Loptsson and other chieftains. The legend is quite comparable with those of Martin, Nicholas, and, in particular Ambrose, who also played an important part in politics, guiding and sometimes reproofing powerful men.

Þorláks saga B, which post-dates the death of Sæmundr, the son of Jón Loptsson, in 1222 and may have been composed on the occasion of the translation of Þorlákr's remains in 1292, is extant in AM 382 4to from the first half of the fourteenth century. In addition, BL Add. 11242 preserves a small fragment copied from when AM 382 4to was in a somewhat more complete state than it is now. It opens with a prologue in which the redactor points out that the composer of the original saga did not sufficiently treat of the hardship Þorlákr endured because of his opponents' attempts to harm the church in his diocese (144), and this he remedies by adding *Oddaverja þáttur* (although it is not presented in its entirety in the *B* version). Otherwise, apart from an account of Þorlákr's ordinances regarding confession and penance for sins and the inclusion of a number of new miracles, the legend in *B* corresponds more or less to that in *A*, though the *A* version abridges the material found in the Latin fragments, and in many respects the *B* version is closer to the Latin text and may be said to be the most detailed source about the life and miracles of Þorlákr.

Þorláks saga C, which post-dates a miracle that took place in 1325, is preserved in seven manuscripts: AM 219 fol. from the end of the fourteenth century, AM 383 4to IV from the fourteenth century, AM 380 4to from the seventeenth century, AM 379 4to (together with *Hungrvaka*) from 1654, AM 383 4to III from around 1400, AM 388 4to from the seventeenth century, and AM 209 fol. (together with *Hungrvaka* and *Páls saga*) from the seventeenth century. Only two of these manuscripts, AM 380 4to and AM 379 4to, preserve the saga in its entirety. The *vita* in *C* corresponds to that in *B*. It is somewhat abridged, yet it does contain some material not found in either *A* or *B*. Moreover, *Oddaverja þáttur* in *C* is inserted later in the saga than in *B*.³²

Like *Þorláks saga A*, *Þorláks saga B* and *C* close with accounts of miracles. These miracles differ considerably in order, extent, and wording. In the *C* redaction, two collections of miracles are added: one, containing accounts of miracles that took place around and after 1300, and another, the so-called 'Second Miracle Collection of Bishop Þorlákr (*Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur*), containing accounts of miracles that took place in Bishop Páll's time. None of the miracles recorded in AM 645 4to are found in the *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur*, and in contrast to the ones in *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna*, which took place mostly in the south of Iceland and in the vicinity of Skálholt in particular, the miracles in *Jarteinabók Þorláks*

byskups önnur are said to have occurred in the diocese of Hólar or are located farther away, in Norway, the Shetland Islands, Lincoln, and Constantinople. The collection ends with a short list of miracles said to have been recorded in Latin by Gunnlaugr Leifsson at the instigation of Bishop Guðmundr Arason of Hólar (1203–37).

The Translation

The text here selected for translation is from *Þorláks saga A*, the oldest vernacular version. It covers the *mors*, *translatio*, and *miracula* sections of the legend of Þorlákr. The translation is based on Egilsdóttir's (*Biskupa sögur II*, 2002) normalized edition of the saga (79–99). Efforts have been made to retain the stylistic features characteristic of the Old Icelandic saga, such as the economical phrasing and the paratactic style. Some formal features, however, have been avoided, above all the use of the historical present tense. No attempts have been made to 'improve' the Old Icelandic text, which was written when composition in the vernacular was still in its infancy; accordingly clumsy or unsophisticated phraseology is more likely to be a reflection of the original than the translation.

Selections from Þ orláks saga A

Chapter 18

The blessed Bishop Þorlákr made his last visitations in the quarter that was nearest to him, and on this trip he came down with the illness that brought him to his grave. He returned home to Skálholt with little strength and was bedridden for three months with a serious illness, but he was never in such bad pain that he was unable to pay attention to everything and arrange things as he wanted.

At that time, Gizurr Hallsson stayed in Skálholt; he was a mighty chieftain, wise and benevolent.³³ He often strengthened the blessed Þorlákr with beautiful exempla of holy men, who courageously had borne their afflictions for the sake of God. Páll, his sister's son, also came to visit him during his illness, because the bishop loved him the most of all his kinsmen;³⁴ and many of the bishop's friends and family members came to him to obtain good counsel from him and to show him their love. Þorvaldr Gizurarson, a mighty chieftain, came. The

blessed Þorlákr gave the clerics and chieftains a detailed account of the see's financial state, and it had become considerably wealthier while he had been in charge. And thus with their counsel he disbursed some money to his poor kinsmen. He gave his finest raiment to the bishop who would succeed him and another to the priests, and to poor people he gave the one that was of least value, because he never left the poor out when he gave gifts to his friends. To Bishop Brandr he gave a finger ring of gold; but his coronation ring he gave to Páll, his sister's son, which was a premonition of his dignity, because Páll became bishop after him, and all people felt that they received something good from what had belonged to him.

Seven nights before his death, he summoned learned men and had himself anointed, and before he got the unction he made a long speech, although it was difficult for him to speak. 'I lay in bed before with little strength and was anointed,' he said, 'and I then requested that all the men whom I had excommunicated should be freed if I died. I intended this as an act of mercy for them, not as a condemnation of me. But they believed that I thought my sentences of them had been too harsh, when those, whom I had placed under a ban for their crimes of not stopping when lawfully admonished, I had requested be freed when I die. But now I request of you that all my sentences of them shall stand, unless those that are under them be reconciled with the absolution that I have laid down before, or else they wait for the decisions of the bishop who comes after me.'

Then he rested and spoke a second time to those who were with him: 'I ask you to forgive me, if I have done what you have not thought right.'

But they all said that they had nothing for which to be angry with him. And Gizurr Hallsson spoke on behalf of all: 'We ask you, lord, to forgive us what we have misdono towards you, which may be both much and great.'

The blessed Þorlákr graciously consented to their forgiveness. Then Gizurr made a speech, in which it was clear that the Holy Spirit was speaking through him. 'We ask, lord, that although you now seem to be departing from us in your bodily presence, you will be to us a spiritual father, interceding with the Almighty God for mercy, because we firmly believe that you will have no less power in the spiritual life with God than you have now.'

But in imitation of God's son, Þorlákr did not answer, when he silently gave assent by being silent to what he did not want to express in words, but he now granted all that which he was then asked for. But because of his humility he would not make it apparent that he was able to do so. And, out of grief, few of those who were present could refrain from weeping.

When the bishop saw that, he spoke: 'Do not grieve, although we must part, because I follow my destiny. I would have been able to do little, if others had not helped me. Your loss when I leave will be small, but after me a mighty chieftain will come. You can take comfort in knowing that I feel confident that God will not condemn me as a man doomed to hell.'

Then he kissed the clerics and gave them his blessing before he was anointed. After he had received the unction he did not want to speak except when only necessary, but his lips moved continuously in prayer while he was alive.

When seven nights had passed from the time he was anointed, he asked early that day for a change of clothes, but the priest Ormr, his chaplain, answered thus: 'It seems to us, lord, risky to move you or do you not want to be dressed in these clothes if you will have a short life?'

The bishop answered: 'It will be alright to move me; I put my trust in God's mercy from the unction and not from these clothes.'

Then other clothes were given to him, and that day he maintained all the same goodly ways. And when evensong was finished he fell into a kind of swoon, and when he opened his eyes, he said: 'Where did Þorkell go now?' But Gizurr Hallsson, a very wise man, took this to mean that Þorkell had appeared to the bishop at his death, because he had most certainly taken him from this wordly life to the pure life.

But when Bishop Þorlákr was near to death, he asked for a drink. And when it was brought to him, he sank back on his pillow and fell asleep blissfully with God, and God granted him this glory that he thirsted at his death just as God's son himself did, and the thirst of neither should be slaked before entering the spiritual life, after which God's friends are continuously thirsting. God showed in the death of the blessed Bishop Þorlákr what he revealed through the words of David, that the death of holy men would be glorious, because it seemed to all better to be with his dead body than with many living men. It also happened after his death that his colour was much brighter than that of other men, and the pupils of his eyes were as bright as those of a living man with good eyesight. There had been many sores on his body, big and small, but they were all healed when he had died, and everyone thought it of great significance, but especially Gizurr as he could see better than others. Then the corpse was prepared and his hair cut. People have that relic in many places and receive many benefits from it.

Bishop Þorlákr died on a Thursday, one night before Christmas Eve. He was sixty years old and had been bishop for fifteen years. Then eleven hundred and eighty-six years had passed since the birth of Christ.³⁵

After the bishop's death, his corpse was carried to church and placed in the choir for three nights to await his burial. And on the second day of Christmas, he was laid in the earth, and there were present the priest Páll, his kinsman, who became bishop after him, and many other learned men. The corpse of a poor man also came to that place. He had been a leper; the bishop had taken him out of poverty and supported him until he died, and God then wanted to reveal his act of charity, which was one of many.

But before men left the burial of the blessed Bishop Þorlákr, Gizurr Hallsson spoke about the tidings that had occurred, as was the custom at the burial of men of rank. He first related what a useful man Bishop Þorlákr had been, both to the see and to all the people of the country. Then he said some words in honour of the bishops who had held the see in Skálholt before Þorlákr came. After that he spoke as follows:

‘It is good to remember, according to our judgment and the report of our forefathers regarding the bishops who have been here before our memory, that the one was considered the best by those to whom he was best known, and glorious men as they have all been in their episcopates, it is nonetheless remarkable how Þorlákr prepared himself for the episcopal office far more carefully than all others. He was chaste all his life, proper and virtuous, swift and just, merciful and able to provide wholesome counsel, humble and zealous in his performance of administrative duties, and gentle, exhibiting true love and affection for both God and people. He was ordained when he was a child, and it seemed to the wisest men appropriate to increase his honour and orders while there were orders left to give him, and at a young age he gave himself to the monastic life and maintained it until his death. Now, even though it is commanded that we not give express judgment upon men's lives, there are few people with hopes of salvation if he is not in full bliss, because he was unlike most men in his life and in his good conduct.’

He ended his speech eloquently.

The lay proprietors of the see and the people of the country far and wide greatly grieved the death of the blessed Bishop Þorlákr, because they thought that he had departed more fully from people than it turned out, because never before had the sanctity or miracles of any man occurred in Iceland other than those of Bishop Þorlákr. Nonetheless many people were comforted by pleasant dreams until God revealed his merits further. And yet the situation was this, that it was then a very lean year with much hardship; the bishop was alone in the country and very old;³⁶ and then unrest began in the north of the country.

It happened in Vatnsdalr that a trustworthy farmer dreamed that he was outside and saw a man come from the south across the heath, and he asked about Bishop Þorlákr's health; but the man answered: 'He is no longer called Þorlákr but rather Ráðvaldr with God.' The farmer told Abbot Karl the dream, and he interpreted it to mean that the bishop had died and lived in glory with God.³⁷

Shortly after the death of Bishop Þorlákr, Gizurr Hallsson dreamed that he saw him sitting in his episcopal vestments on the church in Skálholt, blessing the people. And he interpreted the dream to mean that he was still the superior of his Christendom. Many wise men said that either the sanctity of Bishop Þorlákr would be revealed or else it would not be granted in Iceland, as Archbishop Eiríkr testified in the letter he sent to Bishop Páll, saying as follows:³⁸ 'We believe that our excellent brother, Bishop Þorlákr, to whose memory we pay tribute, was good in life and that he is now a glorious jewel of miracles before God and has much authority.'³⁹

Chapters 20–24⁴⁰

A priest in the north of the country by the name of Þorvaldr dreamed four years after the death of Bishop Þorlákr that he came to him and told him when the weather would improve, because the winter was hard. 'I advise,' he said, 'that men go to my grave in the summer and translate my body, and that, if a sign of holiness seems to be on it, people can make invocations and keep the day holy as is customary.' Then he disappeared. The priest told Bishop Brandr the dream and asked him to take an oath.

During the winter, on the night of Maundy Thursday after Bishop Þorlákr's death, a farmer by the name of Sveinn saw such a great light in Skálholt over Bishop Þorlákr's grave that he could hardly see the church.

The priest Ormr went on Bishop Brandr's behalf to the Althing the following summer to relate what miracles had taken place in these districts through the holiness of Bishop Þorlákr. But his horse came to a halt in a spot of snow so that it could not walk at all, but when he made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr his horse jumped up, and he rode a full day's journey to the assembly. And when this event and several others were reported, people were pleased to hear these accounts, and many people immediately made vows to Bishop Þorlákr for their necessities and seemed to benefit from them, but invocation was then still not permitted by the bishop.

Chapter 23

That same summer Bishop Brandr sent the priest Ormr and his other

clerics to the Althing to have his letters to Bishop Páll and other chieftains read, and his letters testified to the many miracles worked through Bishop Þorlákr. Then men held meetings about these matters, and Bishop Páll was flexible and open-minded, as were many others, in his dealings with other chieftains of the country and in his handling of this joyful news. With the message of Bishop Brandr, it was agreed that on St Peter's feast day Bishop Páll should request in the *lögrétta* that all people be permitted to make vows to the blessed Bishop Þorlákr.⁴¹ Men should hold services in his honour on the day of his death. On the feast day of St Peter, Bishop Þorlákr had been elected bishop, and on that day permission for vows to him was given, and observance of his feast day was made law the following summer after this event. And as a sign that God did not consider this excessive, remarkable miracles immediately occurred at that same assembly.

Chapters 24–32

A man was called Tjörvi; he came down with a bad disease in his hand. His hands became stiff and leprous, so that he could not stretch any finger, and that disease lasted for almost fifteen years. He made a vow to the blessed Bishop Þorlákr that he might recover. After that he fell asleep, and when he woke up and wanted to be washed, his hands were healed. His hands were shown to all those who were present, and the hymn *Te Deum* was sung.⁴² And when this miracle had become universally known, one person after another made vows to the holy Bishop Þorlákr, and it was therefore not strange that the power of the miracles was so great that the requests were granted almost before the vows were made.

At the same assembly, it happened that Abbot Jón from Ver got a sore throat, and it swelled enormously so that he could eat nothing and hardly speak to be heard.⁴³ Then he made a vow to the blessed Bishop Þorlákr that he might get better and immediately fell asleep and woke up fully recovered. This event was related to Bishop Páll.

A man by the name of Guðmundr Gríss, the brother-in-law of Bishop Páll, became very ill. He had neither appetite nor strength, and many people thought he was at death's door.⁴⁴ Then he made a vow to his friend Bishop Þorlákr that he might grant him from God the kind of cure that he thought would be most suitable for him. And when he had made his vow, he recovered day by day and was fully recovered by the time the candle, which he had vowed to give to Skálholt, had burned down, and he himself related this miracle to Bishop Brandr and many other people.

A man from the East Fjords by the name of Sighvatr, who was of a distinguished family, came down with such a bad illness in his eyes that he thought they would burst if the pain did not soon decrease. He

made a vow to the blessed Bishop Þorlákr. He became sleepy after the vow, and when he woke up all the pain was gone from his eyes. But his eyelids were red and very swollen as evidence of the pain he had had in his eyes.

Unas was the name of a man. He caught a painful disease at the assembly; all of his body swelled up. His stomach distended as far as his chest, and the disease was so painful that he could hardly stand up. With compunction he then made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr that he might recover. He became sleepy after that. It seemed to him that in his sleep he saw the holy Bishop Þorlákr and with him the blessed boy Vitus.⁴⁵ The bishop said to him: 'You will not benefit from it even though you may recover, but rather from the fact that now God's time of mercy has come in the form of gifts of healing to people.' He woke up fully recovered.

A man from the northern part came down with a dreadful disease at the same assembly, a disease that instantly caused him to lose his mind. Then others made a vow to the blessed Bishop Þorlákr on his behalf, and he was immediately cured.

A prominent priest by the name of Þórðr became seriously ill at the end of the assembly, and people were worried about him, because he was an important man. He then made a vow to the blessed Bishop Þorlákr that he might be cured, and he got better so quickly that he was able to travel from the assembly with other men, and in a short time he was fully recovered and praised God and the holy Bishop Þorlákr for his health.

At the assembly, it happened that a man from the north lost a good fetter. A careful search was made, but it was not found. And when he had given up hope of retrieving it, he made a vow to the blessed Bishop Þorlákr that the fetter might be found, and it was immediately found in the place where they had searched most often, and they praised God and the holy Bishop Þorlákr.

Árni was the name of a venerable man. He had a bad and dangerous disease in his ribs. He made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr that he might recover and immediately got better.

Chapters 33–53

After the assembly, it happened that Ormr, a kinsman of the blessed Bishop Þorlákr and the brother of Bishop Páll, was in the bath in Skálholt and thought that he would love his kinsman's holiness even more if he inflicted on himself stigmas, and at that moment he scratched his right hand on a razor. It bled violently, and the bleeding could not be stopped.⁴⁶ Then he made a vow to his kinsman and patron, Bishop Þorlákr, that he might stop the bleeding, and since then never a drop came out.

Torfi was the name of a priest. He was of a distinguished family and well married, and his wife is mentioned later in this text.⁴⁷ He got a severe pain in his eyes as he left the assembly, and he didn't sleep the night he stayed in Skálholt. Then he made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr and was later led to church, and during mass he was cured of his illness and went away fully recovered.

A good woman got a bad pain in her eyes and made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr, and she immediately recovered.

Magnús Gizurarson, the foster-son of the blessed Bishop Þorlákr, had a good and profitable farmstead.⁴⁸ But the terrible thing happened that most of his penned ewes disappeared and could not be found, and it was feared that the sheep would swell up and lose their milk. He then resorted to what was to him often the best solution and made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr, his foster-father. After that all the sheep went from the heath towards the ones searching for them and were not swollen.

A young boy got a severe pain in his eyes and was uncomfortable, and it seriously affected his mother. She then took a candle-wick, placed it around the boy's head, and made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr, and he immediately recovered.

A poor man lost a good fetter in the tall grass of the moors, and there was no hope that it would be found. He then made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr that the fetter might be found, and it was immediately retrieved, and the poor man was happy.

A young man rode unwarily where there was volcanic heat, and the legs of his horse got so burnt that people thought it would die. Then a vow was made to the holy Bishop Þorlákr, and the horse fully recovered in a few days. They thanked God and the holy Bishop Þorlákr for this event.

A man got a boil in his throat and was unable to speak. He turned his thoughts to making a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr. That same night the boil burst, and in a few days he had recovered.

There was a man who was so dim-sighted that he could hardly distinguish his own fingers and had been like that for a long time. He made a vow to St Þorlákr for his eyes and was immediately able to see.

The hand of a young man swelled so much that physicians could do nothing. But when a vow was made to St Þorlákr, the hand was cured.

In a big flood, two chests were lost, one full of iron and metalwork and another full of clothing. The owner of the chests made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr, and the chests and all their contents were found undamaged.

In one place people came to an impassable stream, and those who made vows to Bishop Þorlákr got across safely, but not those who did

not.

A young woman was afflicted by such violent pains that people could hardly take care of her. But when a vow was made to Bishop Þorlákr on her behalf, she immediately recovered.

Some merchants in Iceland were in no way able to raise their anchor. But when they made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr, it came loose.

Many people were on a ship from the Westman Islands. They ran into high seas and a storm so severe that their lives were at stake. They made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr for help, and immediately the wind dropped and the sea became calm, and they safely reached harbour.

A married woman lost her fine ring, and it was searched for extensively and frequently, but it was not found. She made a vow to St Þorlákr, and the ring was found where they had searched most often.

A woman came down with such a dreadful disease that she became speechless and lost her mind. But when a vow was made to the holy Bishop Þorlákr on her behalf, she recovered.

An old priest broke his collarbone, and it became so painful and swollen that he couldn't move. He made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr and soon recovered.

A man gave as payment to a poor man a blind sheep and would pay no compensation when the poor man found out. The poor man made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr, and the sheep received sight.

Some thieves stole a great deal of goods from a farm. Those who had been violated made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr that he might compensate them for their loss, for there was shortage of food. It occurred to them to go to a river with a net, and at once they caught so many salmon and so large that they felt amply compensated for their loss.

Chapters 54–64

The lake called Holtavatn became obstructed so that the sand dam was thirty fathoms thick. It looked as if the men who owned meadows by the lake would suffer great damage. Then a certain farmer made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr that the digging would go better than was usual. And the next day the lake had broken through to the sea.

A ship drifted away from a man due to stormy weather and a flood. The one who lost the ship made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr, and in the morning the ship was back in the same landing place.

A young boy fell into a fire and severely burned his hand. But his father and mother made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr on his behalf, and his hand was fully healed within three nights.

A young boy fell into a vat of sour whey and appeared to be dead when he was pulled out. But the boy's father and mother made, with

much grief, a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr that he might live. And at once when the vow had been made, colour came to his cheeks, and after a long while he jumped up, fully recovered.

A man swelled enormously, and his stomach was bloated and made him fat as an ox. But his wife made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr on his behalf, and he soon recovered.

When for the first time Bishop Páll had the miracles worked by Bishop Þorlákr read aloud at the Althing, a blind man who was present received sight and a deaf man hearing.

A certain woman fell into a hot spring in Reykjaholt and got so severely burnt that her flesh and skin came off with her clothes. People made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr on her behalf that she would not lose her feet, and she was fully recovered within a month.

A woman broke her foot, and it became painful and very swollen. She was bedridden for a long time, and physicians could not make her better. She made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr, and the same night he came to her in her sleep and touched her foot with his hand, and she woke up fully recovered.

A man lost a large iron sledgehammer on the sea ice where it was very deep. He made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr and found the sledgehammer on land a day later.

In a storm some merchants from the Orkneys were blown towards the Faroes where there were rocks and breakers, and they all thought that they were sure to die there. They made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr, and immediately the weather changed, giving them a favourable wind.

Other merchants were near death on the North Sea because of stormy weather and high seas. They made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr and immediately got a wind for sailing and fair weather and after that a safe harbour.

Chapters 65–71

A man had an epileptic fit and pain in his eyes. He made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr that he might be cured and did not get better. He was tormented by this illness for a long time, and one night he dreamed that Bishop Þorlákr came to him and said to him: 'I heard your calling upon me, but because you committed a crime to which you have not confessed, you will receive no cure. Now confess to a priest if you want to recover.' Then he woke up. And when he had gone to confession, he recovered.

A woman was in poor health due to a dreadful boil she had had on her stomach for thirty years. She made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr that she might be cured. And the night before the thirteenth day, Bishop Þorlákr appeared to her in her sleep, and she woke up

fully recovered.

A young man was at a game, and his arm was dislocated and could hardly be put back into place. It became so painful and swollen that he could not move. He made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr, and he came to him in his sleep and said: 'You often make vows but do not fulfil them.' And when he woke up he remembered that he had made a vow to him and not fulfilled it. He then honoured both vows and later recovered fully.

A horse was injured by a gelding so that its stomach rotted and had pus running from it. The owner of the horse vowed to give Bishop Þorlákr a half-share in the horse, and within half a month it had fully recovered.

A man had such a sore leg that the cavity along the bone was full of blood and matter, and physicians could not cure it. He made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr that he might be cured, and in his sleep it seemed to him that he came to him and stroked his leg, and he woke up fully recovered.

A young boy came down with such a dangerous disease that his stomach burst. His father and mother made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr on his behalf, and he immediately recovered fully.

Again people made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr that they might get a wind for sailing and received a fair wind. And when they sailed out along a fjord, another ship sailed with a strong wind towards them, and they had made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr for a wind for sailing, and each reached in the evening their desired harbour.

Chapters 72–81

On a winter day two women went in hard frost and severe weather out onto an ice-covered fjord. There one of them gave birth far away from settlement. They made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr for help. People then came and brought them to the village. The baby was so weak from exposure that its bones were all twisted, and its one eye popped out onto its cheek, and sores developed on its body. The grief-stricken mother made a vow to the holy Bishop Þorlákr that he would take mercy on the child. Then she affixed some soil from his grave on the child's eye and laid the child down, and it soon fell asleep. It was then noon, and in the middle of the evening the child woke up fully recovered. Its eye was back in its place, blue in colour and able to see. All sores were healed and the twists were gone. But the eye that had been healthy had a bad colour.

A fire broke out in a house on a farm in the West Fjords. It was expected that the entire farm would burn, and no one was at home except young children. One child made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr for help, and at once so much rain fell from the sky that the fire was

extinguished, but the rain had fallen only on that farm.

A man fell down from a rock and damaged his kneecap and foot. He made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr and soon recovered fully.

A poor housewife made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr that he might give her children something to eat, because it was then a very lean year. She went to the beach and saw a big seal. It lay so quietly when she walked towards it that it seemed as if it was stuck to the stone. She killed it, and it was for her enough food.

A hospitable man could not obtain food because it was a lean year. He made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr for assistance, and a little later a whale was driven onto a shore where he shared drift rights with many men. They fastened the whale, and it looked as if a great disagreement would break out among the men over the division of the whale. Then it became so windy that the ropes broke, and the whale drifted out to sea and then onto land owned by this farmer only.

A poor farmer made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr for food during that same lean year. In the evening, he went to the beach and dropped a fishing line. And in the morning a whale as long as the fishing line had been caught.

A man rowed out and drew a large fish overboard. The fishing line broke and the fish slipped with the hook out into the sea. He made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr, and a little later he found this fish driven ashore and in it his hook and fishing line.

The cow of a poor man fell off a rock and got bruised all over. The poor man made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr, and soon the cow was fully recovered.

A woman became possessed by the devil, but when people poured oil consecrated by Bishop Þorlákr in her mouth, she was immediately cured.⁴⁹

A big tree fell on a woman, so that she got bruised. Her husband made a vow to Bishop Þorlákr on her behalf, and she thought she saw him in her sleep and woke up fully recovered.

Chapter 82

When so many and exceptional miracles worked by Bishop Þorlákr had been made public and read aloud, all the chieftains in the country, learned men and laymen, agreed to have his body translated. Accordingly, Bishop Páll summoned learned men and chieftains in Skálholt. First and foremost Bishop Brandr of Hólar was there; then the priest Guðmundr Arason who later became bishop; Sæmundr and Ormr, brothers of Bishop Páll; Hallr, Þorvaldr, and Magnús, sons of Gizurr; Þorleifr from Hítardalr; and many other chieftains. At that time, there was much flooding all over the country, but God did not want it to impede anyone's journey to the see. And when they had all

gathered, they all held vigil during the night in praise of God and St Þorlákr.

The following day, his holy remains were translated and carried to church accompanied by hymns and songs of praise and a beautiful procession and all the honour and respect that in this country could be offered. The coffin was placed in the choir, and learned men then sang the *Te Deum*, and ill people crawled to the coffin, and many recovered as a result.

A young man of a distinguished family called Þorsteinn, who for a long time had suffered from calculus, fully recovered to the extent that the stone, which was no smaller than a bean, passed from him, and at this stone many signs later occurred.

Uni was the name of a man who had a wooden leg because his leg was crippled, and he fully recovered there.

A young woman who had been crippled since childhood fully recovered there, and God healed many other illnesses and afflictions for the merits of his excellent friend.

A young boy, who for a long time had suffered from epileptic fits, was healed there.

Then the coffin and Bishop Þorlákr's holy remains were carried to the place where he was venerated for a long time.

A poor man wanted to go to Skálholt on this day of glory, because all his fingers were cramped in the palm of his hand, which was greatly withered. But he could not go and met those people who had many happy tidings to report from Skálholt. But he was sad that he had not been there as would have been appropriate. With tears he then made a vow to St Þorlákr, and the following night he fully recovered.

In the same year that Bishop Þorlákr's holy remains were translated, many miracles occurred, which I shall briefly relate.

Chapter 83

Many sick people recovered from no matter what kind of disease they had if they called upon his name. If people were in any kind of peril on sea or on land, their problems were quickly solved when they made vows to him, so that winds dropped and the sea became calm, fires were extinguished, floods receded, storms abated, lost property was retrieved; and if people affixed soil from his grave to wounds, boils, or sores they quickly healed. Cattle recovered from all kinds of disease when vows were made to him.

Because of the holy Bishop Þorlákr's good deeds, which I have now enumerated, much money was given to the see in Skálholt from all the lands in which his name was known, mostly from Norway, much from England, Sweden, Denmark, Gautland, Gotland, Scotland, the

Orkneys, the Faroes, Caithness, the Shetland Islands, and Greenland; but most came from within Iceland. And it is a sign of the love people felt for him that when for the first time Mass was sung in his name in the church, one hundred and thirty wax candles were burning.

Bishop Páll commissioned a goldsmith by the name of Þorsteinn to make a shrine for Bishop Þorlákr's holy remains, the one that exists today, and that shrine now stands over the high altar in Skálholt where God performs all kinds of miracles for his merits. There blind people receive sight, deaf people hearing, cripples are made straight, lepers are cleansed, lame people walk, insane and possessed people are fully cured, and captives are set free in whatever lands they call upon his name. The speechless receive speech, and all kinds of internal diseases and illnesses are cured there, and there is no affliction among people and animals on sea or land for which God does not grant healing and help through the intercession of his blessed friend Bishop Þorlákr when vows are made to him.

Let us now pray that he may intercede for us with the almighty God for peace and prosperity and a good end to this life, and that he may lead us to the heavenly abode, freed of all diabolical power before his chieftainship, so that we may live blissfully with God among the heavenly host in eternity without end. Amen.

NOTES

I am grateful to Ásdís Egilsdóttir, who kindly answered a number of queries about the text of *Þ orláks saga A*, and to Wayne Brabender, who carefully read through the translation.

- 1 Vésteinsson (2000) points out that 'only five churches can with reasonable certainty be said to have been built in Iceland before 1100 ... and only nine Icelandic priests – who can be regarded as historical personages – are mentioned as being active before that date' (25).
- 2 Approximately 80 per cent of all the churches for which *máldagar* are extant were either dedicated to the Virgin, owned an image of her, or possessed a copy of her legend (Hugason 2000, 308; Cormack 1994, 29).
- 3 St Peter was patron of forty-five churches and co-patron of another thirty-three (Hugason 2000, 310; Cormack 1994, 146–

8).

- 4 Prior to this event, Iceland had been, at least nominally, a part of the province of Hamburg-Bremen. The first archbishop of Niðaróss was Jón Birgersson, bishop of Stavanger. The new province included the five sees of Norway (Oslo, Bergen, Niðaróss, Stavanger, and Hamar) together with six others established in the predominantly Norwegian colonies of the British Isles and the Atlantic islands: Orkney and Shetland, the Faroes, the Isle of Man, the Hebrides, Iceland, and Greenland.
- 5 Archbishop Eysteinn himself composed the *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* based on an earlier *vita* and commissioned the Icelandic poet Einarr Skúlason to compose *Geisli*, which is dedicated to St Olaf and declaimed by the poet in the cathedral in Niðaróss, probably in 1153. See ‘St Olaf and the Skalds’ in this volume for further discussion of St Olaf and his cult.
- 6 Cormack (1994) argues that ‘political considerations may have been at work here; Icelanders were generally wary of anything that might lead to claims of sovereignty on the part of the Norwegian kings’ (143).
- 7 Norway had three saints: St Olaf Haraldsson, who had become venerated shortly after his death; St Hallvarð of Vík (Oslo; d. 1043), a distant relative of St Olaf; and St Sunniva, whose relics had been transferred from Selja to Bergen in 1170 (see above, p. 82). The Orkney Islands had two saints: St Magnus (d. 1115), whose relics had been translated twenty years after his death and who had become canonized on the same occasion (see above, pp. 128ff); and St Rögnvald (d. 1158), Magnus’s nephew and the man responsible for having Magnus’s relics translated, proclaimed a saint in 1192.
- 8 Cf., however, *Biskupa sögur II*, lxxxvii.
- 9 Cf. Noble and Head (1995): ‘By the last quarter of the ninth century the Carolingian empire began slowly to dissolve, wracked by feud and civil war, as well as by the often devastating effects of Scandinavian, Muslim, and Slav raids ... These political and social changes brought with them changes in the ideals of sanctity expressed in the hagiography of the tenth century. To be sure, on the Continent, the Carolingian project of writing and rewriting the lives and miracles of long-dead patrons from the past continued, although with somewhat

lesser urgency and vigor ... Such hagiography tended to be the traditional. Innovation lay rather in the depiction of recently deceased figures. That a number of contemporary figures – most particularly those who were neither missionaries nor martyrs – came to be regarded as saints over the course of the tenth century departed from the traditional practice of the Carolingian ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the western Frankish kingdom (that is, France) and Lotharingia these contemporary saints tended to be abbots of leading communities in the monastic reform movement, such as Cluny and Fleury. In Lotharingia, not only reforming abbots, but bishops sympathetic to such reform were regarded as saints. In England the saints tended to be members of the supreme secular or ecclesiastical hierarchy, that is, royalty or bishops. In the east Frankish realm (Germany), the newly installed Ottonian dynasty in essence combined these trends. Their saints were members of the royal family or the episcopal hierarchy, but their lives were composed and their cults promulgated by monastic reformers' (xli–xliii).

- 10 The other bishops of Skálholt were Ísleifr Gizurarson, Gizurr Ísleifsson, Þorlákr Rúnólfsson (1118–33), Magnus Einarsson (1134–48), and Klængur Þorsteinsson (1152–76). The bishops of Hólar were Jón Ögmundarson, Ketill Þorsteinsson (1122–45), and Björn Gilsson (1147–62). The so-called *Rannveigar leiðsla*, contained in *Guðmundar saga*, tells that a woman by the name of Rannveig was taken on a guided tour of the Otherworld by Saints Olaf, Magnus, and Hallvarð. According to these saints, all the deceased Icelandic bishops were saintly, but Þorlákr Þórhallsson and Jón Ögmundarson were the holiest, with Ísleifr Gizurarson, Björn Gilsson, and Þorlákr Rúnólfsson coming next in line (*Biskupa sögur I*, 451–5, esp. 454).
- 11 Ed. Egilsdóttir in *Biskupa sögur II*. Here and in the following, quotations from the various texts concerning Þorlákr are taken from this edition.
- 12 At this time, priests were required to be no younger than thirty years old, although exceptions were made on occasion to allow the ordination of a twenty-five year old (Guðmundsson 2000, 27; *Biskupa sögur II*, 51, n. 2).
- 13 Guðmundsson (2000, 29) believes that Þorlákr may have received financial support from the *Oddaverjar*, with whom his family had close ties. See also Orri Vésteinsson (2000, 152).

- 14 Ásdís Egilsdóttir (*Biskupa sögur II*, 54, n. 1) draws attention to the fact that in the *Canones Nidrosienses* priests are not allowed to marry widows, and that in 1190 Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson wrote a letter to the pope complaining about the fact that Bishop Njáll of Stavanger (1188–1207) was married to a widow.
- 15 According to *Þorláks saga*, signs of his sanctity were revealed already at Þykkvibær: ‘People went to Abbot Þorlákr’s house of canons from other monasteries and religious houses, both people of this land and from abroad to see and learn good customs there, and everyone who went there testified to the fact that they had never come to a place where such a beautiful life was led as there according to the ordinances of Þorlákr. For the first time, people felt that there was great good to be looked for where he was by reason of his holiness beyond what could be worked by others. Many people went away recovered after meeting with him, when he had given those who had come to him with various ailments his blessing and service. Many other things took place about him which people then at once took to be miracles. It happened while he was there that a fire broke out in a house, but when Þorlákr came and blessed it, the fire was extinguished. If livestock fell sick, they always improved when he chanted over them if life was granted to them. His consecrations of water were remarkable in that both people and cattle improved from it. If water consecrated by Þorlákr was sprinkled over cattle, they were not harmed by sickness, weather, or wild animals. If mice were doing harm to food or clothes, they would be struck by disease or disappear before the water if it were sprinkled on them, and they did everything according to his instructions. This water was at once taken all about the neighboring regions and, after Þorlákr had become bishop, all over Iceland, for everywhere men felt that they received help from it in their greatest needs. Nevertheless, wise men were careful not to call them plain miracles when talking about these things or to interpret them as particular signs of his sanctity, because Holy Writ says as follows: “You shall not praise a man in his lifetime. Praise him after his life and magnify him according to the reward of his life” (60–1).
- 16 The archbishop’s refusal to consecrate Þorlákr against the king’s will is peculiar. Egilsdóttir (*Biskupa sögur II*, 65, n. 1) draws attention to the fact that kings had formally renounced their right to interfere in the selection of bishops after the archi-episcopal see was established in Niðaróss.

- 17 Vésteinsson (2000) argues that King Magnús's and Earl Erlingr's opposition to the consecration of Þorlákr 'can only have been because they considered St Þorlákr as a client of the Icelandic chieftains who had been annoying them' (153–4). He notes that 'it is not clear what this dispute was about, although it is likely it had something to do with the priest Helgi Skaptason's dispute with Norwegian merchants in 1172 and 1175' and draws attention to the fact that 'this dispute is referred to in Archbishop Eysteinn's first letter to the Icelanders as conflict between the Icelanders and the Norwegian king' (154, n. 8).
- 18 The saga reports that 'he strictly ordered the Friday fast to be kept in such a way that there should be two meals eaten on no ordinary Friday except the one that is in the week of Easter' (74).
- 19 *Sturlunga saga* 1:131–2. *Oddaverja þáttur* (see below) provides more details about the controversy and reports that the couple eventually agreed to the dissolution of the marriage and were absolved by Þorlákr.
- 20 Ed. Egilsdóttir in *Biskupa sögur II*, 141–224, 251–85.
- 21 Vésteinsson (2000) argues that 'his appointment no doubt reflects the power of the Oddaverjar in the last days of Jón Loftsson. It appears to have been achieved in peace and cooperation with the Haukælir who had signaled their lack of preference by allowing Bishop Brandr to decide and by Gizurr Hallsson's continuing presence at Skálholt until his death in 1206' (154).
- 22 Concerning the decision to make the anniversary of the translation of Þorlákr a Holy Day of Obligation, Cormack (1994, 66, 165) comments that it may be a result of an event that occurred during the preceding year, when, according to Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*, Sturla's kinsman, Órækja Snorrason, called on the saint and sang the prayer *Sancta Maria mater domini nostri Jesu Christi*, apparently with some success, while being maimed by his enemies shortly after this date. She also draws attention to the fact that during the winter of 1236, a poem in Þorlákr's honour was composed by Óláfr Þórðarson *hvítaskáld*, who was Sturla's brother and Órækja's cousin; this poem has not survived.

23 Here and in the following, I rely on Cormack (1994, 159–65).

24 Here reference is made to Egilsdóttir's edition of *Páls saga* in *Biskupa sögur II* (295–332, esp. 310). A whole chapter is dedicated to a description of the shrine in *Páls saga*: 'When Bishop Páll thought that sufficient money, which people gave out of good will towards the blessed Bishop Þorlákr, had been gathered and brought together, he quickly showed what he had in mind to do. He hired a goldsmith by the name of Þorsteinn, who was the most skilful metal worker in all of Iceland. And the bishop's supplies were so abundant that there was no lack of anything that was needed for the work he wanted to have done. He had a shrine made and spent on it an enormous amount of money in gold and gem stones and burnt silver. He also laid out no less money for the shrine and the hire of the smith with the contributions of other men than four hundred pieces of silver. The shrine was so carefully made that it excelled all other shrines in Iceland both in beauty and size, and it was more than three ells long, and there was no other longer than one ell of those that were then in Iceland. No wise man who sees this shrine can question how great a man he must have been who had this shrine made or how wealthy he must have been.' Cf. also below, p. 264. The history of the shrine has been examined by Kristján Eldjárn (1974).

25 The 'Second Miracle Collection of Bishop Þorlákr' (*Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur*, ed. Egilsdóttir in *Biskupa sögur II*, 225–50, esp. 238 and 204) mentions that some of Þorlákr's hair was in Papafjörður and also tells of the arrival of some of Þorlákr's clothing in Flatey. Other relics mentioned include Þorlákr's staff, which is referred to in the so-called Ancient Miracle Collection of Bishop Þorlákr (*Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna*, ed. Egilsdóttir in *Biskupa sögur II*, 101–40, esp. 115); oil consecrated by Þorlákr, which is referred to in *Þorláks saga A* (96, see also below, p. 262), *Þorláks saga C* (266, 282), and *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur*, 228); draperies over Þorlákr's coffin, which are referred to in *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna* (127) and *Þorláks saga C* (255); a belt or strip of cloth that had been tied around the coffin, which is referred to in *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna* (109); and earth from Þorlákr's grave, which is referred to in *Þorláks saga C* (256, 261).

26 Ed. Egilsdóttir in *Biskupa sögur II*, 341–5. The text of this fragment has been translated into English by Wolf (1989, 264–

5).

- 27 Ed. Egilsdóttir in *Biskupa sögur II*, 345–64. These texts have been translated into English by Wolf (1989, 266–75). For a detailed discussion of the texts, see Jensson 2004, 156–68.
- 28 LatIII 1 and 2 imply that there were nine *lectiones* for Þorlákr's Mass in the summer; LatIII 3, however, presupposes only six. This difference could be explained by the fact that in the diocese of Skálholt, where LatIII 1 and 2 probably originated, Þorlákr's feasts were in all likelihood celebrated as *summa festa*, while in that of Hólar, where LatIII 3 is thought to have originated, they were probably celebrated as *mediocria duplicia* (Benediktsson 1969, 107; Helgason 1976, 387).
- 29 Egilsdóttir comments: 'It seems very likely that the *Translatio*, an account of the translation of his relics, and the miracles that took place in connection with it, was among the first writings about Þorlákr. This account could well have been the oldest miracle collection in its original form and LatIII been derived from it, as Jakob indeed suggests. But it is equally likely that an account of the translation of the relics was also composed in Latin. Such an account was necessary, and from this account the liturgical texts may have been derived' (*Biskupa sögur II*, cxxiii).
- 30 The office has been edited as *Sanoti Thorlaci episcopi officia rhythmica et proprium missæ* by Ottósson (1959).
- 31 Ed. Lehmann (1936, 118).
- 32 In *Þorláks saga B*, *Oddaverja þáttur* is inserted where it tells of Þorlákr's marital reforms; in *Þorláks saga C*, the *óáttur* is included after a chapter on the daily customs of the bishop.
- 33 Gizurr Hallsson (d. 1206) was lawspeaker (1181–1200) and also served as a priest. He lived first in Haukadals and later in Skálholt. He was the son of Hallr Teitsson and great-grandson of Bishop Ísleifr Gizurarson.
- 34 Páll Jónsson was the illegitimate son of Jón Loptsson in Oddi and Ragnheiður Þórhallsdóttir (Bishop Þorlákr's sister). He was bishop of Skálholt 1195–1211.
- 35 The time reckoning used in *Þorláks saga* is that of Gerlandus. According to the reckoning of Dionysius the year was 1193.

- 36 The bishop referred to is Brandr Sæmundarson (d. 1201) of Hólar.
- 37 Karl Jónsson was abbot of Þingeyrar 1169–81 and 1187–1207. He died in 1212. He is the author of *Sverris saga*.
- 38 Eiríkr Ívarsson (d. 1213) was bishop of Stavanger and later archbishop of Niðaróss (modern Trondheim) 1188–1205.
- 39 *Heilagur*, which is normally translated as ‘holy,’ may here be understood as ‘saintly.’ This translation is further supported if we understand *kraftar*, which is normally translated as ‘powers,’ as a common translation of the Latin *mysterium*, meaning both ‘skill’ and ‘secret knowledge’; it probably means ‘miracles’ in this context.
- 40 Here the miracle book begins in *Þorláks saga A*.
- 41 The feast day of St Peter is 29 June. The *lögrétta* is the legislative arm of the Althing, which among other things passed new laws and reformed old law clauses. By the time Christianity was introduced, it had 147 members.
- 42 *Te Deum* [*laudamus*]: ‘We praise you, God.’
- 43 Jón Loftsson or Ljótsson was abbot of Þykkvibær in Ver from 1197. He died in 1224.
- 44 Guðmundr Ámundason Gríss was a chieftain and later a monk at Þingeyrar/Þverá. He died in 1210.
- 45 The martyr St Vitus (feast day: 15 June) is believed to have died c. 303. He was invoked as the patron of those who suffered from epilepsy and nervous diseases and from the bites of mad dogs and snakes. He is also the patron of dancers and actors, and in Germany he was reckoned among the Fourteen Holy Helpers. Regarding the vision by Unas at the Althing in 1198, Cormack (1994) comments: ‘It is worth noting that Skálholt cathedral had most recently been consecrated on Vitus’ Mass, and this fact, or the proximity of the feast to the *alóingi*, which met at the end of June, might account for the vow to him at this time’ (159).
- 46 Stigmata had been a sign of sanctity and intense identification with Christ since the time of St Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226). Such markings were expected to develop upon the

bodies of holy persons supernaturally, however, rather than through deliberate self-infliction. Mutilation of the variety described here was strictly prohibited, yet may have occurred among zealous devotees upon occasion, as this account indicates.

- 47 This woman is not mentioned later in the *A* redaction of *Þorláks saga*. From the *B* redaction, it is clear that the woman's name is Halldóra.
- 48 Magnús Gizurarson was the son of Gizurr Hallsson and Álfheiður Þorvaldsdóttir. He was bishop of Skálholt 1216–36.
- 49 *Smjör* is here translated as 'oil.' Cf. Cormack (1994), who argues that 'the substance in question is clearly not butter ... Conceivably in this case it was oil produced from his relics at the cathedral, rather than oil he himself had blessed' (62, n. 75).

St Katarina in Her Own Light

THOMAS A. DUBOIS

The pages of the *Diarium Vadstenense*, the chronicle of the mother house of the Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris (Order of the Most Holy Saviour, or Birgittines), lists the following entries related to the life and career of Saint Katarina Ulfsdotter:

32. 1375. Lady Katarina left to work for the canonization.

34. 1377. Lady Katarina received from Gregory IX a confirmation of the bull of Urban V.

36. 1379. Lady Katarina advanced the cause for canonization before the papal consistory. And she brought with her fifteen articles concerning her mother, St Birgitta. In the same year, on the 30th of December, Urban VI confirmed the rule of the Order of the Most Holy Saviour in the form of its constitutions. 38. 1381. The Sunday letter was F, because it was the first year of the solar cycle.¹ The day before the Feast of the Annunciation, Lady Katarina, daughter of St Birgitta, died. And on the third day after the feast, she was buried in the church or chapel of Vadstena (*Diarium* 36–9; my translation).

Before and between these terse entries unfolded the life of a remarkable woman, one of the best-known but least-studied saints of medieval Scandinavia. Overshadowed in historical accounts, as in her own day, by the imposing figure of her indomitable mother, St Birgitta (c. 1302–73), St Katarina is often treated as a mere aside or footnote, an obedient daughter whose saintly life illustrates more the influence and dominance of Birgitta than any independent act of sanctity of her own. Yet it was this same Katarina who lived alongside her mother in Rome and in Jerusalem for a quarter of a century, helping serve the many pilgrims who streamed from Scandinavia to the holy sites of Christendom and undergoing similar daily mortifications in pursuit of sanctity. Katarina was one of the figures leading the cortège that conducted Birgitta's body back from Rome to Vadstena after her death and one of the chief actors, along with her brother Birger, in the realization of her mother's order of nuns and priests at Vadstena. And it was Katarina who, along with a handful of others, provided the testimony for Birgitta's canonization, ensuring Birgitta's long-lasting

fame, the influence of her revelations, and the success of her order during a century in which only a handful of saints received canonization (Pernler 2003).² It is this industrious and pious woman who forms the focus of the following chapter.

Katarina in the Context of Her Mother's Sanctity

It is important to note in a volume such as this how important St Birgitta was for the history of Nordic saints in general. While participating in the theological and social discussions of a broader Christian Europe, Birgitta possessed a distinctly Nordic identity, one rooted in the royal court of fourteenth-century Sweden. This Swedish focus becomes all the more noteworthy when we consider that from 1349 until her death, Birgitta flourished in the Piazza Farnese in the very heart of Rome, at the house that she and her daughter Katarina shared with their servants, confessors, and various visitors. Birgitta's persona and mystical revelations seized the imagination of Christians throughout Europe during the decades after her death in 1373. Her recorded visions – dictated to her male confessors in Old Swedish and then dutifully translated into Latin by them – addressed important issues of the church at the time: the primacy of Rome over Avignon, the value of clerical poverty, the absolute necessity of a celibate priesthood, and so on. They also addressed secular politics and worldly figures, boldly calling them to accountability from a Christian point of view. And finally, they touched upon important questions of popular piety: e.g., the precise mechanics of a virgin birth, the exact geographic locations of key events in the lives of Christ and Mary, and the actual experiential nature of the Last Judgment. Particularly in the area of lay piety, Birgitta's visions answered some nagging questions in the narrative of mankind's salvation with stunning clarity and vivid detail, filling a void that more abstract or tempered theology could not. Understandably, then, Birgitta's writings, and by extension, her persona, became of intense interest to medieval readers high and low, cleric and lay alike, and many lay readers, including Margery Kempe (c. 1373–1440) and Julian of Norwich (1342–c. 1416) came to view Birgitta as a woman to emulate in their lives. The Birgittine order attracted a tremendous number of women and men, often from aristocratic families, and spread throughout the Baltic region and beyond. Birgitta continues to receive strong attention from scholars (Jørgensen 1954, Stolpe 1973, Klockars 1976, Tjader Harris 1990,

Nyberg 1991, Holloway 1992, Nordahl 1997, Morris 1999, Sahlin 2001, Ward 2002, Beskow and Landen 2003, Hagberg 2003) and was justly named in 1999 a co-patroness of Europe (Ionnes Paulus PP. II. 1999).

Given the undeniable 'star quality' of this post-mortem Birgitta, it is easy to imagine that Katarina would be overshadowed, especially, as we shall see, since she produced no major writings of her own and sought at every turn to downplay her own importance.³ But if we note that the success of Birgitta's image hinged in part on the successful editing of her dictated revelations (a task completed by her last confessor, Bishop Alfonso Pecha de Jaen in 1377), and in part on a swift and successful bid for canonization (a task that was completed in 1391), then it becomes evident that Birgitta's fame owes a great deal to Katarina, the self-effacing but unshakable daughter who outlived her mother by a decade and presided over the house that would forward both projects. In fact, as we can tell from Katarina's own *vita* – written long after her death but based on oral tradition at Vadstena – as well as certain details that find mention in the proceedings for Birgitta's canonization process, the persona of Katarina was probably a sizeable and important factor in the eventual success of her mother's case for canonization, if not also in the sensational success of her mother's book.

One of the challenges of approaching Katarina as a figure in her own right, then, is to sift through the considerable quantity of material on her mother and reinterpret events described there from Katarina's point of view. The task is not always easy. Quite often, Birgittine writings make little or no mention of Birgitta's daughter, even though she was an essential part of the household from 1350 onward. An example occurs in Birgitta's first *vita*, written by her former confessors Prior Peter Olafsson of Alvastra and Master Peter Olafsson of Skänninge and edited for inclusion in Birgitta's canonization process by Bishop Alfonso Pecha de Jaen in 1373. In chapter 70, Birgitta receives a command from Christ to return to Rome from her period of pilgrimage in Jerusalem. Christ's use of the plural pronoun *vos* is the only indication in the Latin text that Birgitta was accompanied by her daughter. In fact, in the entire *vita*, Katarina is never mentioned at all, although mention is made of Birgitta's husband (ch. 23, 25), her sister-in-law (ch. 46), and her son Benedict, (ch. 59). Likewise, as Birgitta lies on her deathbed in the final chapters of her *vita*, having received consolation through a vision of Christ, the *vita* states: 'After these and many other things had been said, she made mention of and arrangements for some persons living with her and whom, before death, she said she had seen standing in God's presence' (ch. 96; Tjader Harris 1990, 98). We know beyond

doubt that Katarina was one of those in attendance at her mother's death, along with her brother Birger and the two Peters (who were later to be venerated as saints as well; Alfonso, another candidate for sainthood, was in Avignon at the time). Thus, it is highly likely that the 'arrangements' described had to do with the Peters themselves as well as with Katarina. Yet no one is mentioned by name, nor are the details of this wider vision made plain. It is quite likely that Katarina, as abbess of Vadstena at the time of the writing of the *vita*, insisted that she remain in the shadows within the narrative rather than stealing the spotlight from her mother. In any case, the reticence of the text to make mention of Katarina in any way whatsoever calls attention to itself by its omissions. As we shall see, Katarina's own holiness and humility certainly contributed positively to the impression of Birgitta as a holy woman and therefore belonged in a *vita* designed to convince the Vatican of her sanctity.

Later texts produced within the Birgittine context show a similar lack of attention to Katarina. Margareta Clausdotter served as abbess of Vadstena from 1472 to 1486, and was a highly regarded authority on Birgitta's life and writings (Patricia 2003, 300). Yet in her history of Birgitta's ancestors and descendants (*Den heliga Birgittas förfäder och efterkommande*) Margareta accords Katarina barely any notice whatsoever. While discussing the more tumultuous life of Birgitta's daughter Cecilia, the valuable properties that Cecilia eventually left to Vadstena, and the miracles that are known to have occurred on the grave of Birgitta's other daughter Ingeborg, Margareta spends little time referring to her order's first abbess at all (*Den heliga Birgittas förfäder*, 54). Of Katarina's life Margareta notes simply: 'St. Birgitta's third daughter was our holy mother and lady Saint Katarina. Her life is in all things clear and honorable' (*Den heliga Birgittas förfäder*, 54).

This apparent lack of interest in Katarina becomes striking when we contrast it with her views of her near contemporary, St Catherine of Siena (1347–80). Catherine also adopted an ascetic life, in her case as a Dominican tertiary living in her parents' home, but soon developed a remarkably outward orientation in her activities and communications. Like Katarina, she was proficient in reading and writing but used these skills to record her own views and experiences, producing writings that remain classics of Western Christianity today. The contrast between Catherine and Katarina reflects contrasting ideals of women's spiritual behaviour in the late Middle Ages: on the one hand, the intense, emotive mysticism of the day could encourage bold voices of female spirituality (witness also Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, and Jeanne d'Arc); on the other hand, older notions of a virgin's humility and a widow's quiet dignity (Katarina was both virgin *and* widow) continued to offer a strong incentive for the self-

effacing spirituality exemplified by the abbess of Vadstena, qualities extolled in the writings (if not the life history) of Katarina's energetic mother (Sjöberg 2003, 183–5).

Families of Saints

In approaching Katarina as a figure in her own right, then, we need to locate her first in her cultural and familial context. Katarina was born to a venerable and pious noble family. She was raised in a convent by an aunt, and her sister Ingeborg entered the Cistercian convent of Alvastra in 1341 (Morris 1999, 48). The family would continue to produce nuns and priests after the death of Birgitta and Katarina. Further, as Birgitta's *vita* points out, Katarina's progenitors for five generations had made pilgrimages during their adult lives to the shrine of St James (Santiago) at Compostela (Lyttkens 1972, 85). Birgitta herself made the pilgrimage with her husband Ulf in 1341, following another pilgrimage the year before to the shrine of King St Olaf at Niðaróss (Trondheim). The journey to Santiago, during which Ulf took seriously ill and nearly died, seems to have made a strong impression on Katarina, who was only ten at the time.

Following their pilgrimage, Birgitta and Ulf adopted a life of marital chastity, an act which Katarina would emulate with her own husband, Eggard von Kürnen, after their marriage in 1345. Ulf and Birgitta both lived in the monastic setting of the Cistercian house of Alvastra in the years leading up to Ulf's death in 1344. Such was not uncommon for noble men and women of the day, as Vauchez points out: a worldly life could be partially redeemed through a retreat into a *vita angelica* late in life (Vauchez 1993, 85–117). Birgitta, however, took this turn in orientation very deeply to heart and soon envisioned her own order of nuns and priests living under a rule she received through a vision from Christ. In 1346 she received a grant of land and a castle from her kinsman King Magnus for the establishment of her order at Vadstena, although the work of concretizing this vision had to wait until after her death.

Piety was not uniform in the family, however. Katarina's sister Cecilia fled the Dominican convent at Skänninge rather than profess as a nun (Morris 1999, 48), and warmed to the cloistered life only after the death of her second husband (Patricia 2003, 54). Worse still was her older brother Karl, who was strongly given to worldly delights throughout his tempestuous life. According to Katarina's *vita*, he once stormed into the bedroom chambers of Katarina and Eggard to find

them chastely sleeping in separate places on the cold floor. In a fury, he demanded that they consummate their marriage. The *vita* also recounts his fury at Katarina for turning the head of his first wife, Katarina Gisladotter. Impressed by her sister-in-law's austere dress, Karl's bride had put aside her noble finery, much to the embarrassment of her worldly husband. Later in life, while still married to his third wife, Karl flirted with Queen Joanna of Naples (1326–82) during the family's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1372. Karl's unseemly behaviour, and the queen's evident sexual interest in him, created a moment of tension for Birgitta (Tjader Harris 1990, 288). Fearing the immanent moral downfall of her impetuous son, she prayed fervently to God. Karl was soon stricken with a fatal illness and died. Birgitta's vision of his judgment before God, however, reassured her of his successful redemption – his salvation the result of God's mercy and the Virgin Mary's advocacy, as well as his own tendency in life to regret wrongdoings after the fact (Tjader Harris 1990, 181–7).

Within this familial context, Katarina seems to have played the role of a dutiful younger daughter. She gladly accepted her childhood upbringing in the convent of Riseberga under the care of the abbess, an upbringing exactly parallel to that which her mother had received thirty years earlier. Katarina's *vita* recounts the abbess's amazement at her charge's early piety, her refusal to play with dolls, and her bouts of demonic assault. Katarina dutifully accepted marriage at the age of fourteen, again exactly as her mother had done, but with the added decision to forego marital relations from the very beginning of the marriage. After only five years of wedded life, she expressed her desire to visit her mother, who had by this time moved to Rome. This decision effectively ended Katarina's marriage, as her husband died the following year (1351), leaving her a widow. She remained for the next twenty-five years at her mother's side in Rome and the Holy Land, acting as helpmate and fellow penitent in her mother's daily prayer and austerities.

Certain of Birgitta's revelations seem to intimate the mother's cognizance of her daughter's quiet sanctity. In one revelation, Christ apparently compares Birgitta and Katarina to Martha and Mary, an analogy that places Birgitta in the role of the wrong-headed active sister and Katarina in the preferred role of the serenely contemplative Mary (*Den heliga Birgitta. Himmelska uppenbarelser* 2:72).

Notwithstanding Katarina's unmistakable sense of duty, certain details of her life also argue for a more headstrong personality. After her initial visit to Rome, for instance, Katarina appears to have been naturally inclined to return to Sweden after her visit. Birgitta may have had her fill of Sweden's corrupt and insincere life, but Katarina had not (Fogelqvist 2003, 204). It was only after her mother received

a revelation from Christ telling Katarina to stay that she accepted her permanent residence in Rome. Even so, Katarina's *vita* reports that Birgitta had her daughter whipped in order to cleanse her of her lingering feelings of homesickness, as the translated selection below shows.

Familial sanctity was a fairly common theme in the High Middle Ages. The intergenerational sanctity of St Anne, Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, John the Baptist, and Christ formed an obvious case, and one popular in pious readings of the day (Ward 2002, 207). In the opening of their *vita* for Birgitta, the Peters write: 'As we read about blessed John the Baptist and about Saint Nicholas, the merits of parents many times cooperate to produce in their children an even greater pace, which perseveres to the end' (ch. 2 Tjader Harris 1990, 71). Although the *vita* makes this observation in reference to Birgitta, it can easily be applied to Katarina as well. In royal circles in Central Europe, the Hungarian Arpad dynasty had become known for its intergenerational sanctity, as thirteenth-century St Elizabeth (1207–31) had been followed by her niece St Margaret (1242–70). Margaret, in fact, had professed her vows in a convent built for her by her mother, at an altar dedicated to her aunt St Elizabeth. The Arpad saints included a further two princesses – St Elizabeth, daughter of Stephen V, and St Elizabeth, daughter of Andrew II – and were broadly popular throughout Eastern Europe as well as in Italy. The intergenerational theme found a Scandinavian counterpart in Magnus the Good, the near-saint son of King St Olaf. Magnus's body was laid to rest beside his father's in the Church of St Clement in Niðaróss (Trondheim) after his death at the hands of his rapacious uncle, King Harald Sigurðursson (*Heimskringla* 1932, ch. 30; Monsen 1990, 523). Before his death, Magnus had been the major caretaker of his father's relics, opening the saint's casket at intervals to trim his beard and cut his fingernails (ch. 25; Monsen 1990, 520). King Harald took charge of the key to Olaf's casket after Magnus's interment and maintained Olaf's cult at Kaupang and Niðaróss until his own departure for England in 1066 (cf. ch. 38, Monsen 1990, 529; ch. 44, Monsen 1990, 532; ch. 80, Monsen 1990, 559). And the Danish royal house had its own share of saints, duly canonized and celebrated in liturgical calendars throughout the region, as discussed in the chapter on St Knud Lavard in the present volume. Thus, it should come as little surprise that Birgitta, a sainted mother, became known as the mother of one, if not possibly two sainted daughters, and numerous holy grandchildren as well, as Margareta Clausdotter asserts in her fifteenth-century account (*Den heliga Birgittas förfäder*, 54).

Of Mother and Daughter

Indeed, Pope Urban [VI] himself was so impressed by [Katarina's] wisdom that he said to her in a friendly manner when she had spoken before him and the cardinals: 'Truly daughter, you have drunk of your mother's milk!' (*Vita cum miraculis* 1981, 10)

The life of a sanctified virgin does not usually involve having children of one's own. Thus, Birgitta's embrace of a nun's life after bearing eight children was bound to cause some logistic and spiritual difficulties. These seem to have been particularly difficult in the relation that developed between Birgitta and Katarina during their life together in Rome. We see the first intimation of such difficulties in the account of Katarina's arrival as described in her *vita*:

Then [Katarina] travelled ... with great difficulty through Germany and Italy and arrived in Rome during the month of August [1350]. Her holy and God-fearing mother St Birgitta was at that time visiting a monastery at Farfa, near Bologna, in order to correct the abbot and the monks there as Christ had instructed. Thus, she stayed there for some time with her confessor Peter Olafsson and a few other members of her household. For eight entire days, Katarina and her companions searched for her mother in Rome and were very troubled, for Katarina could not imagine where she could have gone. In the meantime, Lord Peter, confessor to holy Birgitta, received a wondrous intuition and feeling in his soul. He felt such a strong compulsion to return to Rome that he could scarcely sleep or eat until he had got underway. Saint Birgitta sent him away with reluctance but nonetheless, he set out and soon came to the city. And in the Basilica of St Peter he met the Lady Katarina and her companions. With great joy he received them and realized in truth that the Lord had caused him to return to Rome so quickly for their sake. The next day Lady Katarina and her companions, along with Lord Peter, came to the aforementioned monastery to visit Lady Birgitta. (*Vita*, 1981, 8)

The scene serves as a *mise-en-abyme* for the situation that would become a theme in the two women's lives: Birgitta's complete devotion to her spiritual relation with Christ and the resulting lack of

attention she could give to her dutiful but often overlooked daughter. Tellingly, God sends his message not to Birgitta but to her confessor, as if to say that such mundane details as a daughter's whereabouts are beneath the notice of Birgitta herself. And even though, in one of Birgitta's revelations, she is reassured that her family will be provided for in Rome (*Den heliga Birgittas Reuelaciones extrauagantes* 107, 255–6), we can surmise that Birgitta herself was entirely too remote to handle most of the pertinent details herself. Such would seem inevitable, in that, as Birgitta's *vita* points out, she endeavoured neither to speak to others nor look in their faces (ch. 84–5; Tjader-Harris 1990, 96). Her *vita* notes that 'she attended to the welfare of the persons living with her even more than she did to her own. For sometimes she was actually concealing her own ruined shoes even while asking for new ones to be given to others' (ch. 91, Tjader-Harris 1990, 97). Yet this attention does not seem to have always been directed towards Katarina. In one of her revelations (*Den heliga Birgittas Reuelaciones extrauagantes* 69, 191–2; see also Morris 1999, 113), after Birgitta has diligently prayed to the Virgin for a total conversion of heart to Christ, Mary responds somewhat chidingly that Birgitta should mend her daughter's dress. Katarina rejoices, the Virgin notes, in the old and tattered state of her garment, preferring its gray homespun to silk or other finery. The Virgin goes on to remind Birgitta of her daughter's considerable sacrifices, her relinquishing of all worldly things, including her husband:

She has given up her husband with his consent, whose body she loved more than she loved herself and whose soul she loved more than both their bodies. She herself has given up brothers and sisters, kin and friends corporeally so that she might aid them spiritually. In worldly possessions she takes no delight. Because she gave up all her circle, her sins have been forgiven her. Henceforth let all be steadfast, for in exchange for worldly possessions she shall be given Jesus Christ as her bridegroom in the kingdom of heaven. And all who love her shall progress towards God because of her. (*Den heliga Birgittas Reuelaciones extrauagantes* 69, 191–2)

The passage recurs nearly word-for-word in Katarina's *vita* (25) as well as its Old Swedish translation (*Om Sankt Katarina av Sverige*, 551). We can note, then, that Birgitta's perceptions of her daughter, her observance of her daughter's needs, are secondary: they are mediated by Birgitta's supernatural interlocutors, who enjoy the saint's primary attention.

This tiered or mediated relationship is evident as well in the events

that lead to Katarina's decision to remain in Rome. As her daughter prepares to return to Sweden, Birgitta asks that she 'remain in Rome and endure all sorts of labours and adversities for Christ's sake and honour' (*Vita*, 9). The request comes not, then, from mother to daughter, but at the instigation of Christ himself. Katarina responds in like manner that *for Christ* 'she would gladly give up not only her homeland, friends, and kin, principalities, and pleasures, but even her husband, whom she loved more than even her own body' (*Vita*, 9). After making this pronouncement, Birgitta reveals to her daughter the vision she has received from Christ, in which Christ has revealed to her the immanent death of Katarina's beloved Eggard and confirming his will that Katarina stay in Rome as her mother's assistant:

Your daughter Katarina is the person that I have promised to you as an assistant by divine commission in your labours. She is the lovely shoot that I myself will plant under my right arm so that it may grow into a fruitful tree. And because she thirsts for the rain of mercy I shall water her with my wisdom. Advise her, then, that she should stay with you for some time, for it is of more use for her to stay there than to return home. For I will do unto her as a father does with a daughter who is beloved of two men, one poor and the other rich, while the daughter loves them both. When now the prudent father sees the maiden's affections and perceives that she loves the poor man, then he gives him fine clothes and gifts but he promises his daughter's hand to the rich man. Thus will I do as well. She loves both me and her husband. And since I am the wealthier, and indeed, the Lord of all, I will furnish him with my gifts that are of most use to his soul, inasmuch as it pleases me to call him to me soon. And the sickness from which he now suffers is a sign that he shall die. And since he shall now stand before the Almighty, let him have his account book in hand, and be freed of all that is corporeal. But I will guide her once and again, until she becomes fit for the work which I from eternity have intended for her, and which it pleases me to reveal to her. (*Vita*, 9)

The revelation occurs in the compendium of Birgitta's visions edited by Alphonsus (*Den heliga Birgitta: Himmelska uppenbarelser* VI, no. 118) as well as in Katarina's *vita* (9) and its Swedish rendering (*Om Sankt Katarina av Sverige*, 535). The only difference between these versions lies in the image of the lovely shoot that appears in the *vita* but not in the earlier published revelation. What is remarkable about the vision, however, is the dual persona of Christ the speaker as both Katarina's prudent father *and* her willing bridegroom. He is the one who

perceives his daughter's divided love and aims to remove the obstacle to their union by giving gifts to the poorer suitor (Katarina's husband). At the same time, he is also the wealthy bridegroom as well. And in the end, his advice is more weighted towards the paternal: he wishes Katarina to stay with her mother so that he can guide her until she is fit for the work that he has planned for her – presumably, the realization of her mother's monastery and order.

Notwithstanding her good intentions, however, Katarina's *vita* recounts that she soon grew homesick for Sweden and asked her mother for permission to leave. In response, Birgitta prays to Christ, who again appears to her and instructs her to tell 'that maiden, your daughter' that she has become a widow (10). When Katarina still retains a longing for home, Birgitta asks her confessor Peter to whip Katarina so as to drive the failing from her soul. Katarina, too, approves of the method, which eventually purges her of the temptation (10). Again, we see the distancing of the two women's mother-daughter relationship through the mediation of Christ and the confessor Peter. Yet at the same time, Katarina is forcefully inscribed as a daughter figure rather than as an adult widow of equal status with her older counterpart.

The one area in which Birgitta's attitude towards her daughter appears most maternal is in her attempts to protect Katarina from the untoward advances of Italian men. Katarina's threatened chastity becomes a major theme in the central portion of her *vita*, for, in contrast with her aging, short mother, the widow Katarina is young, tall, and strikingly beautiful. Thus, she attracts the attention of many potential suitors, some highly eligible, others unscrupulous. The *vita* attributes this situation to the moral decay that Rome had suffered through the absence of the pope. Whatever the case, however, Birgitta feels compelled by circumstances to confine her daughter to the household, while she and her confessors continue to visit the various holy places throughout the city on a daily basis. Frustrated and bored by her sequestered life, Katarina slips into despondency, a state which Jørgensen (1954, 71) likens to the *accidia* of cloistered nuns. One evening when Birgitta and Peter return from their day out, they find Katarina sitting listlessly by herself. She barely speaks to her mother. As a result of this cold encounter, Katarina has a dream during which she is strongly reprimanded by the Virgin Mary for her bad attitude. When Katarina asks the Virgin to save her from a raging fire, the Virgin responds:

'How can I help you when you long so to return to your homeland and your friends and relatives? You care nothing for the vow you made to your God; you have become disobedient to

him and to me, to your mother and your spiritual father.’ ‘Oh my dear Lady,’ said Lady Katarina, ‘I will gladly do whatever you tell me.’ The Holy Virgin then said to her: ‘Then obey your mother and your spiritual father in my name; that is what I want you to do. You shall see that this is pleasing to me.’ (*Vita*, 11)

Here again, Katarina’s personal religious experience becomes one with her role as her mother’s daughter: the Virgin, like Christ before, speaks to her as one would to a young girl, admonishing her to show obedience not only to God and Mary, but also to her mother and confessor. Later versions of her *vita* depict her attempting to disfigure herself or fleeing her mother’s home altogether, taking refuge at a convent before eventually acquiescing to a life of obedience at Birgitta’s side (Jørgensen 1954, 70).

Although the Katarina depicted in these accounts appears to show little independent initiative, and thus, potentially, little active role in her own salvation, it is important to regard these images from the perspective of the intended readership of Katarina’s *vita* at the time of its preparation. Katarina was the historical first abbess of an order of contemplative nuns, a body of women and men who came to Vadstena not to engage in active life but to embrace an existence of cloistered separation from the world. Many of the women who entered the convent were of noble background and had enjoyed the benefits of wealth and comfort in their parents’ estates in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, or Prussia. Especially during her novitiate, it would be easy for a young woman to pine for her childhood home, friends, and family, or to fall into the kind of despondency from which Katarina suffered. So, too, absolute obedience towards a potentially distant and uninterested mother superior could prove trying for a young woman, especially if the young woman were battling strong emotional urges or depression. Katarina’s *vita* would have assured such a reader that even great saints of the past experienced such tribulations and further, that even seemingly stolid elderly nuns had once been young and emotional too. When viewed from the perspective of a contemplative audience – and Ulf’s experience as a confessor to such nuns – the particular details and images of Katarina’s *vita* appear well chosen.

The near-total submergence of Katarina’s self-expression into acts of filial duty can also be seen as a portrayal of heroic humility. Both in her *vita* and in the events of her life that we can reconstruct independently, it appears that Katarina strove diligently to remain out of the spotlight. Such is not to say, however, that she did not have strong spiritual experiences of her own. Her distinctive spiritual

outlook, evident in her vivid dream vision of the Virgin, is also evidenced in her vision of her sister-in-law Gyda at the time of the latter's death. According to her *vita*, Katarina meets and speaks with an unidentified female pilgrim one day. The woman asks Katarina to pray for her sister-in-law Gyda (Karl's second wife) back in Norway. Katarina's servants see their mistress speaking to someone, but can neither see nor hear the interlocutor. Birgitta becomes aware of the death of Gyda only after Katarina has reported her strange encounter to her. In a very real sense, then, it is Katarina who becomes the visionary here, even if the *vita* gives Birgitta the final word in pronouncing the absent Gyda dead. This reversal in supernatural insight is underscored narratively in the *vita* by the fact that Gyda bequeaths the women an expensive crown, the sale of which supports the household for an entire year. That Gyda should have sought out Katarina's prayers in particular signals the latter's notoriety among those who knew her.

Other narrative evidence points to the fact that Katarina, although quintessentially humble, was also regarded with great esteem by her contemporaries. Towards the end of her *vita*, while accompanying her mother's body back to Vadstena, we find her forcefully decrying the abuses of the Teutonic Knights to their faces (28). At the same time, as her *vita* makes clear, Katarina remains throughout life a characteristically soft-spoken and forbearing person, showing great patience towards even the most irritating novices in the order (31). Her patience, again, became a source of marvel for her contemporaries as well as for those who followed in the office of abbess of Vadstena. When back in Rome to work for her mother's canonization, Katarina was asked to testify on behalf of the Roman pope Urban VI (r. 1378–89) during the succession struggle that occurred between supporters of Avignon and Rome following the death of Gregory IX in 1378, a clear sign of the deference shown to her by even the most powerful male clerics of her day. And finally, while still living in Rome, her *vita* depicts her being approached by a horde of panicked Romans, asking her to call back the waters of the flooding Tiber (32). That Katarina does so reflects her clear favour from God; that the citizens know to ask her reflects their recognition of her as a singularly holy individual, even in the context of the church's very centre.

Perhaps the most interesting but also most ambiguous aspect of Katarina's spirituality is her eventual spiritual relationship with St Sebastian (d. c. 288). Katarina had been able to visit St Sebastian's shrine along the Appian Way during her initial time in Rome. She and her mother also frequented the Church of St Sebastian, one of the seven principal basilicas of Rome. Eventually, Katarina turns to

Sebastian as a spiritual spouse, as well as a protector of her constantly threatened chastity, noting that Sebastian, like her beloved Eggard, had been a soldier in life. Their relationship, although only implied in Ulf's earliest *vita*, becomes highly elaborated in later versions, in which, for example, Katarina's prayer to God for permission to marry Sebastian is given in detail (cf. *The Life of S. Catherine*, 1973). In Falconer's seventeenth-century rendering, for instance, based on the *Historiae seu vitae sanctorum*, the relation of Katarina and Sebastian is described as follows:

And visiting one day S. Sebastians Church, as she was about to receave the holy Sacrament of the Altar, all bathed in teares after her accustomed manner, she humbly besought her gracious Lord present therein, to allow her her choice there made of a second husband, & to bequeath the safe keeping of her Virginitie vnto him: 'and I meane no other' (said she) 'then your glorious Saint, and Seruant S. Sebastian himselfe, sometymes a Captaine in this world, as Egardus my former spouse was, who delighted (as you know best O Lord) to keep me, and himself vndefiled for you untill this day.' And many accidents afterwards plainly shewed, that Christ & the Saint had accepted her prayers offered vnto them. (*The Life of S. Catherine*, 33–4)

This occupational link with Eggard appears on the surface to be the chief source of Katarina's interest in St Sebastian. She does not appear to have been drawn to him out of interest in any of the things for which he was generally known as an intercessor: protection against the plague, or as a patron of archers, athletes, and soldiers. Perhaps the image of his having been nursed back to health by a pious widow helped establish the association between this third-century soldier saint and the fourteenth-century Katarina. Whatever the case, Katarina's experience of mystical marriage with him is unique: where most Christians of her day formed devotions to one or more saints, often of the same gender, describing that relationship as a marriage was exceptional, except in the case of a spiritual marriage to Christ.

Mystical marriage to Christ had in fact become increasingly common by Katarina's time (Poulain 1910; Ward 2002, 199). St Catherine of Alexandria (d. c. 310), St Catherine of Siena (1347–80), and the later St Catherine dei Ricci (1522–90) were all credited with the experience. Catherine of Siena in particular had described her mystical wedding in detail after her experience of it in 1366, as did Margery Kempe after her experience in 1414. Women's words were also turned into visual images in the paintings of famed artists of the day, adding further weight and familiarity to the experience. In its

highly personal and emotive details, mystical marriage seemed to exemplify the characteristics and aims of late medieval spirituality.

Yet Katarina is virtually alone in her experience of mystical marriage with someone other than Christ himself. Although we cannot know for certain the reasons why Katarina's spiritual life took this turn, it is clear that Katarina's bond with Sebastian freed the mother and daughter from the conceptual difficulties of contemplating spiritual marriage to the same man. Certainly, within the spirituality of their day, Christ could be said to call all people to close personal relations with him. Yet at the same time, Birgitta's intense, intimate conversations with her spiritual spouse through her visions seemed to set her apart as a particular favourite. Given, too, that many of Christ's words to Birgitta regarding Katarina were framed in paternal exhortations, it is easy to see how Katarina might have found it difficult to think of Christ as her bridegroom too, even if he described himself that way in the revelation recounted above. Katarina's humility, too, may have made Christ seem too high a goal for her aspirations. With St Sebastian, on the other hand, Katarina was on more equal ground, enjoying intimacy and assistance from a spiritual friend who had little or no relation with Birgitta. And as Christ promised to consecrate Birgitta as a nun upon her arrival in heaven, so he could then take Katarina as his bride after her contemplative life here on earth. Katarina's relationship with St Sebastian may thus have helped her await her turn with the lover of all souls.

The Path towards Canonization

While Birgitta's canonization proceeded at a startlingly accelerated pace – due largely to her repute in Rome and certainly to the energetic efforts of Katarina and her confessors – Katarina's cause proceeded with more of the care and deliberation usually associated with the process. Indeed, nearly a generation transpired before concerted efforts occurred to secure Katarina's status as a saint worthy of official veneration. While Birgitta's first *vita* appeared soon after her death, written by men who knew her personally (and followed by others written by further personal friends, Birger Gregorsson and Nikolaus Hermansson), Katarina's first biographer entered the monastery at Vadstena nearly three decades after Katarina's days on earth had ended. Ulf Birgersson joined the order in 1407, and began his work on Katarina's *vita* only after he had attained the status of confessor general, an office he held from 1423 to 1426. He died in

1433. The *Diarium Vadstenense* notes at his passing (item 437, 204) that he was especially knowledgeable in the area of Birgitta's revelations, and that background must have prepared him admirably for the work of preparing Katarina's *vita*, as the above quotations illustrate. Nevertheless, his work could not have the immediacy or clarity of Birgitta's *vitae* and had to be painstakingly assembled from oral tradition and occasional textual references. The power of an oral tradition within a closed monastic setting such as Vadstena's should not be underestimated, however, and at several points in the *vita* Ulf is able to name first-hand witnesses who recalled for him their dealings with the order's first abbess.

The genesis of Ulf's text, in fact, was associated with one of the miracles eventually cited in favour of Katarina's canonization. The account, appended to the end of the *vita*'s first published version (see below) reads as follows:

A nun at the Vadstena convent [Bengta Gunnardotter, eventually abbess of the order from 1422–47] had suffered for some years from a serious illness, so that she often received the last rites and the other sacraments. The doctors had given up hope for her recovery and viewed her as doomed to die. Sometimes the terrible pains lessened, and then she bade a brother, her confessor [Ulf Birgersson] to make a vow to some saint and ask that, through the saint's intercession she be made fit enough to peruse her books of holy readings and utter a few of her pious prayers. For she doubted that she could ever be restored to full health. But when the brother considered what vow to make for her assistance, his mind turned to Lady Katarina. He vowed to write her life story and collect the accounts of her miracles if only she would intercede for the poor sick woman that her suffering be somewhat lightened. As soon as he made the vow, the sick woman began to feel better.

Time went by and the brother forgot his vow and abandoned the task of writing Katarina's biography or collecting her miracles. Thus the nun's illness turned worse than usual. Then the brother realized his lethargy and negligence and feared that he would have punishment and condemnation to expect, since he had proved so negligent as to set aside a firm vow. He renewed his vow, made a clear confession, and asked God to spare him from punishment.

After a few days had gone by, and the brother had begun to

write the life story of the holy Katarina, he dreamed that he was in the monastery's refectory. There he saw Saint Birgitta sitting at the end of the table where the confessor usually sits. There were also other people with her, but which and how many he could not tell. Then he saw the Lady Katarina walk up to the table and she met him there in the middle of the refectory and stretched her hands out to him. She pointed towards his hands and from that he was led to know that if he performed his vow to its completion, the sick nun would recover.

This vision recurred for the next two nights. Therefore the brother committed himself to pushing forward his research on Katarina's life and miracles, especially through contacting the people who had been among her circle before her death in the city of Rome, the German realms, and in Sweden. With long interruptions, he wrote down what he had been able to hear and because of his slothful nature, it took nearly two years before he was finished with the honourable Lady Katarina's biography.

During this whole time, the nun lay suffering her protracted illness. But when Lady Katarina's life and holy deeds had been written down, the nun was restored to her former health. (44)

The passage underscores how closely associated the writing of a *vita* was with the assertion of a person's sanctity and the degree to which a saint – even one as humble in life as Katarina – could prove insistent on her story being told. It is interesting, however, that Katarina never speaks in Ulf's visions, her muteness echoing her lack of self-aggrandizement, even when compelling Ulf to undertake the work.

The relative slowness of Katarina's canonization process also does not imply a lack of interest in her as a potential intercessor or model. In fact, it is clear that numerous men and women appealed to Katarina in their prayers from the time of her death onward. Petitioners often were associated with the Birgittine order, as in the above account. But this tendency was not exclusive. One of the earliest recorded miracles attributed to Katarina after her death involved the survival of a three-year-old boy who was thought to have drowned. Upon recovery from the water in which he had struggled for two days, the child credited the help of a lady in white who gave her name as Katarina of Vadstena. She had instructed him to come to Vadstena after being saved. It was in carrying out this request that the boy's grateful parents were able to report the miracle to the monastery's authorities.

Lay and religious alike thus reported miraculous assistance from the first abbess of Vadstena.

Gradually, as with other saints, the list of miracles began to grow, and at the order's general chapter at Arboga in 1474, the assembled members voted to initiate canonization proceedings for Katarina. The process was formally opened in Rome the following year. The delegates made frequent reference to a work known as the *Libellus rubeus*, a compendium of sixty-one recorded miracles along with Ulf's *vita*. Collijn (*Processus*, xi) attributes this work to Bishop Henrik Tidemansson of Linköping and dates the text to 1469.

In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII gave formal permission for Katarina's local veneration, an important step towards formal and universal canonization. In 1487 the *Diarium Vadstenense* mentions the departure for Rome of Clemens Petersson, confessor general of the order, and Johan Matsson, both of Vadstena. They were to testify on Katarina's behalf in the canonization proceedings before the papal consistory. In his recorded testimony later that same year (*Processus*, 51ff.), Clemens credits as sources not only a Latin *vita* but also accounts written in the vernacular as well. Also testifying at the time was Abbess Margareta Clausdotter, who had written her own chronicle of the life of St Birgitta while living in the women's side of the Vadstena monastery (*Processus*, vii).

The order made every use of its available personnel and technology to support Katarina's cause. They commissioned a published version of Ulf's Latin *vita*, along with an appended list of miracles, which was produced in Stockholm in 1487, just in time for Clemens to take to Rome. Katarina's *vita* thus became one of the very first books ever published in Sweden.⁴ Soon after, a new vernacular translation of Ulf's *vita* was produced at the Birgittine house at Nådendal (Naantali), Finland. Its translator, Jöns Budde, had also translated portions of the Bible as well as other spiritual literature (*Vita cum miraculis Katherine*, 1981, 8).

Although Katarina's canonization as such appears strongly driven by her order, it is clear that secular authorities and the laity of Scandinavia also favoured the cause. In 1485 Regent Sten Sture's daughter Birgitta entered the convent at Vadstena (*Diarium*, item 862, 362–3). And at the triumphant translation of Katarina's relics in 1489, following her official recognition by the Vatican in 1488, Sten was one of the secular dignitaries selected to carry the saint's casket (*Diarium*, item 886a, 376–7; see translated selection below). Like many other rulers of Sweden before him, Sten seems to have recognized the importance of paying homage to Sweden's saintly family and the religious community that fervently upheld their memory throughout the region. His act would have helped endear him to the country's

populace, while confirming the linkage between the crown and the church.

A century after her death, then, Katarina's sanctity was magnificently confirmed in a formal translation that went on over several days. The ceremonies, recorded in loving detail by the Birgittine monk Torsten Johansson some years after the fact (*Diarium*, items 884–5, 370–7, translated below), included homilies in both Latin and Swedish, as well as a drama (*spectacula*) performed during the ceremony for the benefit of lay onlookers. Bishops from throughout the realm assembled for the event, along with other clerics of various ranks and backgrounds. Crowds of lay people had converged upon Vadstena to witness the events. Secular and religious, high-born and low, weak and powerful – Katarina appealed to all. Her humble life, her ceaseless deference to her mother, and her quiet but effective leadership of the Birgittine order became enshrined as models for other Christians to follow. Her order would become one of the most influential in all of Northern Europe and one of the prime custodians and promoters of the cult of the saints in late medieval Scandinavia. Katarina became one of the last and greatest canonized saints the region would produce during the Middle Ages.

The Translations

The following selections are drawn from the first published version of Ulf Birgersson's *Vita cum miraculis beatae Katherine*, which appeared in Stockholm in 1487. They relate Katarina's marriage, early miraculous experiences in Rome, return to Sweden, work at Vadstena, and death. The translation is based on Lundén's 1981 facsimile edition. A second selection from the *Diarium Vadstenense* recounts the translation of her relics in 1487, as recalled after the fact by the Birgittine monk Torsten Johansson. The account indicates the grandeur of her cult at the close of the fifteenth century.

The Life and Miracles of St Katarina

When Katarina had reached marriageable age [13], she entreated God and the honourable Virgin Mary that she be allowed to preserve her virginity. In obedience to her father she agreed to marry a noble man, Lord Eggard [von Kürnen]. When the day of the wedding arrived, and

the couple was alone in the bridal chamber, this maiden – devoted as she was to God and the Virgin Mary – urged her bridegroom with pious words to make with her a vow of chastity. And Christ came to her aid, for it is he who engenders all purity and every chaste intention in the souls of his chosen friends. They strengthened their vow of mutual chastity they had made to each other with the sacrament of Eucharist and they loved each other ardently in the Lord. Amid their outwardly worldly display, they managed to outwit the enemy of purity with holy cunning.

How dear this vow of virginity was to God can be seen from the following event, which is worthy of telling. Once when Katarina's God-fearing husband was hunting a doe with hounds, after the manner of noble men, it happened that Lady Katarina was being conducted by wagon through the same forest on some other errand. The doe, exhausted by the wild hunt and panicked by the hounds, lost all sense of fear and dashed to Katarina as her last refuge. Mild and tame, it buried its head in the breast of the chaste woman, who subdued its wild urges. When her husband and his companions arrived in pursuit of their quarry, Katarina addressed them. She showed them the deer where it lay hiding beneath her dress and asked them humbly if she might be allowed to release her captive – by which she meant the deer – to freedom. They readily assented to this request and the beast sprang away into the forest again. Then together they rejoiced greatly in the Lord, felt comforted, and thanked him, who can subdue and tame the wild beast.

* * *

Then [Katarina] travelled ... with great difficulty through Germany and Italy and arrived in Rome during the month of August [1350]. Her holy and God-fearing mother St Birgitta was at that time visiting a monastery at Farfa, near Bologna, in order to correct the abbot and the monks there as Christ had instructed. Thus, she stayed there for some time with her confessor Peter Olafsson and a few other members of her household. For eight entire days, Katarina and her companions searched for her mother in Rome and were very troubled, for Katarina could not imagine where she could have gone. In the meantime, Lord Peter, confessor to holy Birgitta, received a wondrous intuition and feeling in his soul. He felt such a strong compulsion to return to Rome that he could scarcely sleep or eat until he had got underway. Saint Birgitta sent him away with reluctance but nonetheless, he set out and soon came to the city. And in the Basilica of St Peter he met the Lady Katarina and her companions. With great joy he received them and realized in truth that the Lord had caused him to return to Rome so quickly for their sake. The next day Lady Katarina and her companions, along with Lord Peter, came to the aforementioned

monastery to visit Lady Birgitta.

The abbot of the monastery received them cordially out of respect for Lady Birgitta, through whose holy exhortations he had come to live a better life. For several days, they remained together there, but then, at Lady Birgitta's behest, they returned to Rome and fulfilled with great humility the tasks of their pilgrimages by visiting the various stational churches and saints' graves.

After having spent some weeks in Rome, Lady Katarina preferred to return to her homeland. When she was ready to leave, her mother, the holy Birgitta, asked her – at Christ's instigation – whether she would remain in Rome and endure all sorts of labours and adversities for Christ's sake and honour. Caught up in the Holy Spirit, Lady Katarina replied that if Christ so wished, she would gladly give not only her homeland, friends, and kin, principalities, and pleasures, but even her husband, whom she loved more than even her own body. Then, when Lady Katarina agreed that she would remain, Christ appeared to her mother, St Birgitta, and said:

‘Your daughter Katarina is the person that I have promised to you as an assistant by divine commission in your labours. She is the lovely shoot that I myself will plant under my right arm so that it may grow into a fruitful tree. And because she thirsts for the rain of mercy I shall water her with my wisdom. Advise her, then, that she should stay with you for some time, for it is of more use for her to stay there than to return home. For I will do unto her as a father does with a daughter who is beloved of two men, one poor and the other rich, while the daughter loves them both. When now the prudent father sees the maiden's affections and perceives that she loves the poor man, then he gives him fine clothes and gifts but he promises his daughter's hand to the rich man. Thus will I do as well. She loves both me and her husband. And since I am the wealthier, and indeed, the Lord of all, I will furnish him with my gifts that are of most use to his soul, inasmuch as it pleases me to call him to me soon. And the sickness from which he now suffers is a sign that he shall die. And since he shall now stand before the Almighty, let him have his account book in hand, and be freed of all that is corporeal. But I will guide her once and again, until she becomes fit for the work which I from eternity have intended for her, and which it pleases me to reveal to her.’

From that day onward, Katarina's eloquence grew to such heights that she could fearlessly bear witness to God among the highborn and the educated. Indeed, Pope Urban [VI] himself was so impressed by [Katarina's] wisdom that he said to her in a friendly manner when she had spoken before him and the cardinals: ‘Truly daughter, you have drunk of your mother's milk!’

Some time passed after Katarina had promised to stay with her mother. And then she was seized by a longing for a varied life and remembered her former freedom. Filled with sorrow, she asked her mother's permission to return to Sweden. Her mother prayed to God that Katarina would be able to resist this temptation. And Christ appeared to Birgitta and said: 'Tell that maiden, your daughter, that she has now become a widow. And I have decided that she shall stay with you, for I will care for her myself.' But however humbly she submitted to God's will and pleasure, she could not help but think of her dear childhood home. With her all will and understanding she endeavoured to drive such thoughts away. Then she told her solicitous mother that, if by some divine guidance, she could think of a useful corrective for her, she might charitably use it upon her. Her respectful mother, who had already triumphed over such temptations herself, thought of a salubrious corrective for a daughter beset with worldly feelings. She called in her teacher and confessor [Peter] and bade him, with touching and devout words, to drive out this temptation from Katarina's soul with the help of a whip. Lady Katarina also urged him to use this corrective upon her. And as often as she felt her confessor apply the whip, she said: 'Spare me not, but whip me harder; you have not yet touched my heart of stone.' Master Peter thus continued to whip her, but then suddenly, she burst out in glad tones: 'Enough! Now I feel that my heart has been changed and that the temptation has entirely fled.'

At that time, the pope was residing in Avignon, so that many of Belial's sons could work evil without fear of punishment. They threatened the general safety of the city and perpetrated acts of violence in the streets and markets with impunity. As a result, pilgrims and simple folk began to fear to visit the stational churches and places where indulgences were granted. Above all else, these ruffians were a threat to young women. For this reason, Lady Katarina's mother forbade Katarina to visit the places where indulgences are granted without a large and strong following. For some days, Katarina was thus obliged to remain at home with the servant girls while her mother and confessor visited the pilgrim sites and indulgence churches without her. Katarina began to harbour bitter feelings. 'Such a miserable life I lead here,' she thought. 'Others improve themselves and win benefits for their souls. They visit the graves of saints and attend Masses, while I am denied entirely all spiritual advantage. Alas, my siblings and relatives back home in Sweden can serve God in security. Why should my life be so miserable? Would it not be better to not exist at all than to live a life of so little use to either body or soul?'

As she sat there, absorbed in her sorrow, her heart filled with great

bitterness. And just then, as she sat overcome with sorrow, her mother and her confessor Lord Peter arrived. They asked her the reason for her forlorn appearance. But because of her violent resentment and pain, Katarina could not answer. Her mother demanded that she do so in the name of holy obedience. At the mention of obedience, Lady Katarina spoke, as if from deep in her heart, and said: 'Lady Mother, I cannot speak.' Her face was wan and her eyes askew, so violent was the torment that raged within her.

The next evening, Katarina dreamed that the whole world was on fire and that she herself stood on a little plain in the middle of the fire. She was greatly frightened and full of trembling, for she doubted that she could escape the fire. Then the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, appeared before her. Katarina called to her humbly and said: 'Oh, my dear Lady, help me!' The Virgin Mary answered her:

'How can I help you when you long so to return to your homeland and your friends and relatives? You care nothing for the vow you made to your God; you have become disobedient to him and to me, to your mother and your spiritual father. 'Oh my dear Lady,' said Lady Katarina, 'I will gladly do whatever you ask of me.' The Holy Virgin then said to her: 'Then obey your mother and your spiritual father in my name; that is what I want you to do. You shall see that this is pleasing to me.' At that, Lady Katarina awoke and hurried with all submissiveness to her mother. And bending knee beside her she implored her mother to forgive her obstinate disobedience, which she now knew was a sin and displeasing to God, the honourable Virgin, and her mother. Then she related at length her vision and promised that she would gladly obey her mother to her very death and persevere beside her in her pilgrim's exile. Her mother was overjoyed at her daughter's marvellous turn of heart and said:

'Christ has wrought this change. Blessed be he who lets all work for the best with those who love Him!'

* * *

During the time that Lady Katarina lived in Rome with her mother, she displayed a great earnestness of demeanour, despite her young age. (I should think she was but twenty.) And although she was so mature in character, she was possessed of such bodily appearance that she touched many hearts and was pleasing to every eye. Many noble men wished to marry her and made appeals both personally and by other means. They promised her great and valuable things such as wedding gifts if she would only agree to marry them. But Katarina answered them all with firmness that she had taken a vow of perpetual chastity and that she did not intend to enter into married life again with any mortal bridegroom. Blinded by passion, they tried to win by threats and violence what they could not obtain by promises

and blandishments. So they laid ambushes for her upon the streets and byways in the hope of abducting her, so that – stripped of her mother’s pious advice – she might at last succumb to their proposals.

It happened one holyday, while her mother was absorbed in some other duty, that Lady Katarina set off with some Roman ladies to the Church of Saint Sebastian outside of Rome, intending there to receive indulgences.⁵ A noble lay in wait, hiding in a vineyard with a great host of men in hopes that Lady Katarina and the other noble ladies might pass that way. When he caught sight of her amidst her company, he commanded his followers to ready themselves for the attack. They rushed out of their hiding place to plunder the innocent. But they stretched their wicked bowstrings for nothing. For the Lord’s judgment defeated them: he always shelters and protects those who place their trust in him. And when thus the godless men were about to pounce, a stag came charging at them. It was an act of God. And while they busied themselves trying to capture the stag, Lady Katarina and the other ladies hurried back into the city. Thus, Katarina escaped like a little doe from their hands and like a bird from the fowler’s snare.⁶

The blessed Birgitta, her mother, saw in a vision the danger from which her daughter had been saved, and said to Katarina upon her return: ‘Blessed be the stag who mercifully saved you today from the roaring enemy’s treachery. God’s noble mother permitted me to see what happened when I addressed a prayer to her.’ Lady Katarina could thus say with the beloved bride in the Song of Songs: ‘Be swift, my lover, like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices!’⁷

From that day on, Katarina dared not walk openly between the pilgrim sites. She visited only the church that was located nearest to her house and seldom wished to be seen on the street. Rather, she preferred to stay at home, for ‘like golden pillars on a silver base, such are shapely legs on firm-set heels.’⁸ Out-side the walls of Rome she dared not go, unless she received through some divine message assurance that no danger awaited her. She did not want to let the devil’s wish to bring her down succeed. If, through one of her mother’s divine revelations, she received assurance that no danger lay in wait, then she did not hesitate to go at once to the places where indulgences are granted.

It happened once on the eve of the feast of St Lawrence [10 August] that St Birgitta said to her daughter Lady Katarina: ‘Tomorrow, with God’s help, we shall visit the Church of San Lorenzo.’

Lady Katarina answered her: ‘Mother, I fear greatly that that lord – you know of whom I speak – shall fall upon me and steal me away from your company on our way there.’

Her mother replied: ‘I hope and trust in the Lord Jesus that He may today free us from the hands of that man and preserve us from all

danger.'

On the Day of St Lawrence, they left home and made the sign of the cross five times to symbolize the five wounds of Jesus and to implore St Lawrence's aid. Armed with these weapons they arrived unscathed at the Church of San Lorenzo.⁹ The lord had hidden himself during the night with his servants in a vineyard along the way. When day broke, he intended to rush forth from his place of hiding and steal away the innocent Lady Katarina. But God humbled him as he lay mired in his evil. For when the sun had already risen and a good deal of the day had already gone by, his servants became impatient and said to their lord: 'Lord, why are we still waiting here?'

The lord answered: 'We must wait for the ladies whom we plan to plunder today.'

The servants said: 'It has been a long while since she passed by; she must have got to the Church of San Lorenzo long ago by now.'

The lord asked them if it was already day. They answered him: 'Of course, lord, daylight streams about us and the sun has risen high into the sky.' Only then did the lord perceive that the Lord God had raised his hand against him as he had sat waiting to undertake his evil plan. When he turned his eyes upward, he saw nothing.

At his request, he was brought to the Church of San Lorenzo. When he arrived, he asked his servants whether they could see the Lady Birgitta and her daughter. They looked about the throngs of visitors at the church and told him that they were there. Then he asked to be brought to the women, and when he came before them, he threw himself down upon his knees and cried out in a loud voice that his new and sorrowful predicament was a punishment from God for the evil he had planned to work against them. And he asked them humbly if, for God's sake, they would forgive him his sin. He promised God that he would never again undertake such wrongdoing and added that he would use his powers to protect and assist them and willingly and gladly carry out all their wishes. When he made this appeal before them, he suddenly regained the light in his eyes.

From that day forward, he held them in great esteem and honour and showed them every courtesy. The same lord testified before Pope Urban V and the assembled cardinals of the grace and wonder that he had experienced and praised the great works of God.

* * *

How effectual Katarina's prayers were when she prayed out of love and sympathy for another is shown by the great number of miracles that resulted. For while her dear mother St Birgitta still lived and was living with her in Rome, Lady Katarina lay in prayer before the altar of St John the Evangelist in the Church of St Peter. Then a female

pilgrim appeared dressed in white, girt with a belt and topped with a white veil upon her head as well as a black cape on top of her dress.¹⁰ This woman hastened to Lady Katarina, greeted her by name, and humbly asked that she pray for the Norwegian woman's soul. Lady Katarina got up and asked her where she was from. The pilgrim said that she was from Sweden and that Katarina's brother, Lord Karl's wife had died. Lady Katarina invited her to her mother's house, but the pilgrim excused herself and said that she did not have time to stay. 'Pray warmly for the Norwegian woman's soul!' she said again. 'Soon you shall receive a request from your homeland and a help, for the Norwegian woman has willed you her golden crown.' Then she vanished.

Lady Katarina was astounded, turned to her servant girls who had been standing beside her and asked where the person had gone that she had been speaking to. They answered: 'We heard you talking to someone, but we could not see anyone.' It happened that Lady Katarina recounted the event for her mother, the holy Birgitta, in terms of what she had both seen and heard. When the mother asked with urgency, it was revealed to her that Lady Gyda, Lord Karl's wife, had died, and that Lady Gyda's soul had appeared and asked for her prayers. Not long after, Ingevald Amundsson, Lady Katarina's servant, arrived from Sweden. He confirmed Lady Gyda's death and presented them with the gift she had willed them, namely the golden crown. She had worn it during her life, as was the custom in her country, for Lady Gyda was of a noble Norwegian family. But the crown was of such value that blessed Birgitta, her daughter, and all their household were able to live for an entire year on the money that had been gained by selling the crown.

* * *

The worthy and diligent Lady Katarina did not work only the aforementioned wonders during her life; still others she accomplished in the twenty-five years that she spent in Rome with her worthy mother St Birgitta. During this entire time she was her mother's constant companion on her pilgrimages and visited with her, in order to gain indulgences, not only the stational churches of Rome but also various saints' graves and various places and countries. They also visited the Lord's burial place in Jerusalem, consumed with great sorrow and overcome with the wonderful love of God. Then, when they had visited all the various monuments in the holy city of Jerusalem, her mother, St Birgitta began to suffer from a fever, which continued until they both returned to Rome. There the Lord Jesus appeared to his holy bride [Birgitta] and announced to her the day and hour of her departure as well as certain things that would happen.

The holy Birgitta told her confessors and Lady Katarina everything that Christ had revealed to her and entrusted her with.

The worthy Lady Katarina had been her mother's most trusted helper in all the tasks that Christ had entrusted unto her during her lifetime. Following her mother's instructions after her death, she had her body interred in the monastery of San Lorenzo in Panisperna, just as the deceased had asked in accord with Christ's will and command. Christ had revealed to her mother that her body should be interred in Rome and then brought home to Sweden. This task the Lady Katarina fulfilled with the help of the holy Birgitta's confessors once five and a half weeks had passed. So the journey home began that same year. Great signs occurred as the deceased's flesh separated in a wondrous fashion from her bones.¹¹ The journey home occurred amid miracles along the way until at last the body was brought to the monastery at Vadstena, as has been stated elsewhere in greater detail.¹² When the worthy Lady Katarina was bringing home her holy mother's remains, women came to her of both noble and low estate to pay their respects to the holy relics and kiss them in pious reverence. To those who came she gave beneficial exhortations to leave aside the world's corrupt vanity and luxuries and better conform to the divine will. At Katarina's blessed exhortations, many noble men and women were seized with guilt and were brought to a change of heart. With the help of God's grace they began to lead better lives. So at length she came with the holy relics to the city of Danzig in Prussia. Two of the leaders of the city, who had followed her from Rome and travelled in her company, praised God's might and grace in this holy woman. Lady Katarina condemned firmly the Teutonic Knights' misdeeds: filled with the Holy Spirit she announced to them fearful punishments that God had in store for them, as God had revealed to the holy Birgitta. She feared not their worldly power. Thus truly she could honestly attest to the eternal Judge: 'I shall speak of your instructions before kings and will not be put to shame.'¹³ Wonder arose from her marvellous eloquence, which was full of divine wisdom. When she spoke all who were evil closed their mouths and the world's wisdom could not deny the truth.

* * *

At last she came to the monastery of Vadstena just before the octave of Sts Peter and Paul [29 June] and was received with great jubilation into the community of brothers and sisters. All the sisters she treated with motherly love, filled with joy that they were well and making progress in holiness. She spoke with the brothers and the sisters about their duties, entered in *clausura*, and made of herself a wondrously pious offering to God, glad to have weathered the storms of life. At this time she began to lead the sisters. For some twenty-five years,

while her mother still lived, she had followed the rule of the Most Holy Saviour in her own spiritual life. And now she clarified the rule for the sisters through her holy conduct and great energy. She became an excellent model for every detail of the rule.

Therefore she shunned everything that was not compatible with a pious life, such as slander and bickering. It is said that one time she was speaking to her niece Ingegerd, who was very young at the time and who later became consecrated as the abbess of Vadstena. And she said: ‘Dear Ingegerd, what are you working on with those embroidery needles you are holding in your hands?’ The girl held up some brocaded fabric she had been working on, as young girls will, and answered: ‘Dear aunt, I am making a picture of two animals biting each other on their backs.’ The worthy Katarina sighed deeply and pronounced these prayerful words: ‘Mildest Jesus, in the name of your most loving and worthy mother, I ask you to keep damaging back-biters away from this order, which is dedicated to your virgin mother.’ She recalled indeed the words of a saint that said that he who slanders and he who willingly listens to slander both bear the devil in their tongues.¹⁴ The entire community of brothers and sisters thus looked to her to see reflected a paragon of goodness and holiness. And they noted how fervent she was in her prayers and how patient in her illness.

* * *

It happened in Rome, while Katarina was there [working for her mother’s canonization] that the Tiber River flooded so violently that the Lateran bridge, the Monastery of St James and many other nearby buildings lay under water. The Romans feared that the city would be destroyed by the fearful flood. After conferring among themselves, they came to Katarina’s house and asked her to come with them down to the shore of the flooding river and pray to the Lord for an end to his terrible situation.¹⁵ In her humility, Katarina regarded herself as unworthy and with tears in her eyes refused their entreaties. But when they saw that they would get nowhere with their fervent requests, they seized her by violence and carried her out of her house and out to the mass of flooding water. Oh what a wondrous event! Now the miracle of old was renewed, wherein the Jordan stopped flowing at Joshua’s command.¹⁶ For when her feet touched the river, it receded at once and returned to its usual course. Thus the flooding waters fled when the holy woman approached. All were filled with wonder at this, and praised the all-powerful God who does wonders in the waters through his saints. Now the worthy priest Brother Peter, of holy memory, prior of the Cistercian monastery at Alvastra, was present at the time. And he exhorted Katarina’s household with these words: ‘The wonders that you have witnessed today you must commit to

memory. For in the future you will be asked both of this event and of others of her wondrous deeds and powerful acts, which God has chosen to accomplish through her.'

The worthy Lady Katarina then travelled to Naples in order to write down and assemble accounts of miracles for the canonization of her mother. And these included miracles worked both before and after her mother's death, for Birgitta was very well known for her holiness. Thus, a woman who possessed great worldly wealth and power came to Katarina and related tearfully her daughter's woes. The daughter was a widow, and was sorely beset by a demon during the night. The woman had dared not discuss the situation with any of her relatives, but when she had heard of Katarina's reputation for holiness, she took courage and told Katarina of her daughter's situation.

When Lady Katarina heard of their dreadful plight, she felt great compassion in her heart. And reciting a Hail Mary to herself silently – as she did whenever she was asked for spiritual advice – she proceeded to give them some very good counsel. First, they should sincerely confess all their sins, for it is because of unconfessed and unforgiven sins that many people fall prey to such evils. Further, they should go with the deepest humility to the Church of the Holy Cross barefoot and without linen clothing on. And before the crucifix there they should recite seven Our Fathers and Hail Marias in memory of Christ's suffering. And Katarina would also pray for them – although she felt unworthy to do anything useful for them. This she promised with humility and compassion.

Both women did as Katarina had instructed and on the eighth day they came back to her praising God, for he had already shown great mercy to them on account of Lady Katarina's helpful advice and prayers. For the hideous demon had appeared before the younger woman in the silence of the night with horrible threats, saying: 'Cursed be Birgitta's daughter, who has separated me from you! Now I can never come back to you.' In this way the prayers of the holy woman Lady Katarina pursued the fiend and bound the evil spirit in the darkness beneath Egypt.¹⁷

Because of this and other signs of the Lady Katarina's holiness, she was regarded as a saint in Rome, Naples, and several other places in Italy and Germany. And people were certain that she was well favoured in God's eye. Therefore, many in need came to her for help and advice, and to ask God to help them. And through her honourable prayers and services they received good help for their needs.

* * *

The worthy Lady Katarina died at the monastery of Vadstena on Sunday, 24 March 1381, the day before the Feast of the Assumption. And the day after the feast she was honourably interred. Beside her

grave and in her memory many blessings occur for those who pray piously to her to obtain for them the favour of God which is promised to and wondrously wrought in all his saints.

* * *

Diarium Vadstenense [Chronicle of Vadstena]

11 November 1489.

In the year of our Lord 1489 ... on the day before the Feast of St Peter in Vincula, a Friday, the following persons entered the brother's chancel: his excellency Jakob, archbishop of Uppsala, the holy fathers Henrik of Linköping, Brynolf of Skara, Olaf of Västerås, and Nils of Växjö. And with them was the worthy Doctor Ragvald, archdeacon of Uppsala, Doctor Matthias, deacon of Uppsala (both Doctors in Canon Law), and Doctor Jakob, canon of Uppsala (and Doctor of Theology). Canon Jakob delivered a sermon in Latin for the benefit of the clergy, just two hours before the translation of the relics of St Katarina, St Birgitta's daughter, was to take place. Also attending in the chancel were a great many prelates, curates, vicars, and chaplains from both the monastery and from the various churches. I believe there were more than a hundred such there. And at about four o'clock the doors opened and everyone entered into the brothers' chancel to hear the sermon in Latin. It was delivered (as mentioned above) in the presence of the bishops and all the clergy who were assembled between the railing and the high altar. The ambo (where the preacher stood) was set up in the cathedral near the altar of St Andrew and erected at such a height that the preacher's feet were fully an [aln](#)¹⁸ above the high altar.

When the sermon had concluded, the priests all marched out through the gate in the railing. Then the archbishop and the four aforementioned bishops and a few other prelates and canons also in the brothers' chancel or sanctuary blessed and consecrated the image of St Katarina, which had cost the monastery one hundred Rhenish florens. And each and every person who worthily prayed before this picture was granted by the five bishops forty days' indulgence, upon the authority of the confessor general and entire brothers' monastery of Vadstena. And after that, they went into the sacristy and inspected the objects that were to be used in the following ceremony. Then, after the blessing, they processed out in the same order they had entered.

The next day, on the Feast of St Peter in Vincula, at eight in the

morning, the aforementioned men, the archbishop and the four other bishops, and with them a sixth bishop, Herman, a friar from the Dominican priory at Skänninge, along with the three aforementioned doctors from Uppsala, and other prelates, catechists, and canons, from the various cathedrals in Sweden – some twenty-four persons in all – returned to the monastery through the brothers' orchard. They all entered reverently into the sacristy together. There the six bishops all put on their robes, aided by eight other prelates and canons, who were clothed in dalmatics. The rest of the clergy, each dressed in surplice and cape, readied themselves for the procession.

And when they processed to the grave where the holy Katarina's bones lay, a fine drama was performed for the folk who stood watching. And directly after that, the archbishop led with a clear voice the *Veni sancte Spiritus* and *Veni creator Spiritus* with a versicle and a collect concerning the Holy Spirit, while all the clergy continued to sing with jubilation and genuflections. And each of the bishops held in hand a thurible [censer], wafting a sweet incense over all.

When the grave was opened and the casket with Katarina's bones was drawn up and broken open, the archbishop lifted first the saint's skull and laid it in a suitable vessel. Then he placed the breast or collar bone in another vessel made of crystal. And finally he placed an arm bone in a gilded silver vessel made in the shape of a hand. And then since there were no more specially designed vessels for particular relics, Bishop Henrik of Linköping lifted up each bone and handed it himself to the archbishop, who laid all the bones in a simple, red-painted shrine of wood. After that, the shrine with its bones was placed in a larger and more precious shrine adorned with silver, silk, gold, and gems. Throughout this process, the bishops and priests sang with wondrous devotion the antiphon *Pretiosi sancti Dei* and *Regnum mundi*. The sisters then continued to sing with joyous voices a sequence about holy Katarina herself, and continued to sing right to the end.

During this time, the shrine with the head of the holy Katarina was borne to the high altar and presented to the kingdom of Sweden's victorious leader and regent Lord Sten Sture. He received the relic along with his assembled lords and advisors of the realm.

Finally, the relics were distributed to both the ecclesiastical and the worldly authorities and Lord Sten received and bore the vessel that contained Katarina's skull, while the others who had been selected for the honour bore the shrine. And so, while the clergy and bishop proceeded, they entered first via the brothers' chancel entry. Then they went out through the monastery churchyard in joy and jubilation. And people all about applauded and rejoiced and sang a new song to the Lord.

When the procession was completed and each and every person had returned to the brothers' chancel, the archbishop celebrated a high Mass in honour of St Peter with a beautifully composed collect concerning St Katarina. When this was finished, everyone left in the same order they had entered. These are the names of the worldly lords who were permitted to enter the brothers' chancel to bear the shrine of Katarina: first and foremost, Lord Sten Sture, regent of the realm; then the knights Gustav Olofsson, Nils Sture, Gregers Matsson, Åke Jönsson, Hans Åkesson, Erik Ottesson, Nils Eriksson, as well as the other knights Nils Klausson, Erik Karlsson, Karl Bengtsson, Svante Nilsson, and Arvid Knutsson.

It should be noted that on the day before the aforementioned translation, the bishop of Linköping celebrated a High Mass and delivered a sermon for the laity in Swedish. He stood before the altar rail of the brothers' chancel in the high ambo. But the day after the Feast of St Peter in Vincula, which was also Katarina's translation day, Bishop Brynolf of Skara celebrated a High Mass in honour of holy Birgitta's daughter, the holy Katarina. He presided at the high altar in the brothers' chancel using the office *Dilexisti iustitiam*, etc.

Also on the following day, a Monday, the archbishop sang a Mass at the high altar in the brothers' chancel and consecrated as a sister a virgin named Agneta, who was born in Prussia. But, as if to ratify all that had been said and done by the high clergy during the previous several days, the bishop of Linköping, the monastery's ordinary bishop, celebrated a Mass at noon on Tuesday in honour of holy Birgitta's daughter, the holy Katarina, using the same office which the bishop of Skara had used. The only difference was that he performed it right outside the brothers' *clausura*, beside the altar of St Katarina.

NOTES

- 1 The Sunday letter system is an old method of keeping track of what day of the week the year begins on. The Sunday letter F means that the year 1381 began on a Saturday. This information would allow a reader to calculate that the Feast of the Annunciation (24 March) occurred on a Thursday, so that Katarina died on a Wednesday and was buried on 27 March, a Sunday.
- 2 Only five saints were canonized during the fourteenth century: Pope Celestine V (d. 1296, can. 1313), Louis of Anjou (d. 1297,

can. 1317), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274 can. 1323), Ivo Héloroy of Kermartin (d. 1303, can. 1347), and Birgitta of Vadstena (d. 1373, can. 1391). Birgitta's was one of the swiftest attainments of the status, and the only one involving a woman (Pernler 2003, 177).

- 3 Kirsch (1910) credits Katarina with one book, a compendium of scriptural passages, saints' lives, and excerpts from other spiritual books entitled *Siælinna Tröst* (Consolation of the Soul). This work, however, which survives in a single manuscript (Holm. A 108), is more generally regarded as a free translation of a late-fifteenth-century Middle German text *Der selen troyst*. Although the Old Swedish version may have been produced at Vadstena, and cites Birgitta's authority at several junctures, it is not possible to attribute it definitively to Katarina. For detailed discussion of this work, see Thorén 1942. For a complete transcription of the Old Swedish text, see *Själens tröst* (http://www.nordlund.lu.se/Fornsvenska/Fsv%20Folder/01_Bitar/B.R18.A-ST.html). Katarina's personal book of hours is preserved at Vadstena. According to Jørgensen (333) it was probably produced in France but possibly purchased in the Holy Land.
- 4 Collijn (*Processus* 1942–6) lists Bartolomeus Gothun (Ghotan) as the *vita's* publisher and describes it as the first book ever published in Sweden. In his facsimile edition of 1981, however, Lundén places Ghotan – who also published the first collected edition of Birgitta's revelations – in Lübeck and credits the *vita* to Johann Snell, who had earlier published an edition of *Dialogus creaturarum* at his new press in Stockholm. Katarina's *vita* would thus become the second book ever published in Sweden. In any case, the Swedish bishops had already made use of publishing with their editions of missals, breviaries, and calendars. These earlier works, however, had all been produced overseas, in cities where print technology was already well established. Katarina's *vita*, then, can be regarded as part of the early history of printing in Scandinavia itself.
- 5 The church and catacombs of San Sebastiano fuore le mura are located along the Appian Way, some kilometres beyond the walls of Rome at that time. From the Piazza Farnese, Katarina would have left Rome through the Gate of St Sebastian, some four kilometres away. The church was a popular site of pilgrimage at the time.

- 6 Cf. Psalm 141:4–5 and Psalm 91:3.
- 7 Song of Songs 8:14. The figure of the stag here is linked exegetically to Christ; in the context of later legends of St. Katarina, however, it appears to have been identified as St Sebastian, whose shrine Katarina had been planning to visit. Later versions of her *vita* depict her praying to St Sebastian before the journey and explicitly selecting him as her spouse. It is possible that such traditions arose from the conjunction of St Sebastian's shrine and the image of the stag/bridegroom in Ulf's text. Also possible, however, is that Ulf knew the tradition of Katarina's mystical marriage but only implies it in his text, since the *vita* was intended to make as clear and unambiguous a case as possible for her canonization.
- 8 Ecclesiasticus 26:18.
- 9 The church of San Lorenzo in Panisperna was one of Birgitta's favourite places of prayer. It is located due east of the Piazza Farnese, some two kilometres distant. On the Feast of St Lawrence (10 August), the church hosted a large liturgical celebration, and the Poor Clares of the adjacent convent customarily served ham and bread to all pilgrims.
- 10 The description fits a typical Beguine's clothing, such as Katarina herself had worn while still living in Sweden.
- 11 Only the saint's bones were taken to Sweden; their rapid loss of flesh during their short time of burial was regarded as a great sign of God's favour and certainly eased the transport of the bones across the continent to Vadstena.
- 12 Ulf refers here to Birgitta's own *vitae*, which were well known to his audience.
- 13 Psalm 119:46.
- 14 James 3:5–10.
- 15 The Piazza Farnese is located close to the Tiber River – hardly more than a hundred metres away – near the present-day Ponte Sisto. It is likely that Katarina returned to this house while working for the canonization of her mother. The Vatican is roughly a kilometre away.
- 16 Joshua 3:13–17.

- 17 The image refers to the angel Raphael's binding of the demon and imprisonment of him in the desert of Egypt; Tobit 8:3.
- 18 An aln refers to the length from the elbow to the tip of the little finger (cf. English ell; roughly 45 inches).

PART IV

Saints' Lives in Lived Context

Hendreks saga og Kunegundis: Marital Consent in the Legend of Henry and Cunegund

MARIANNE E. KALINKE

Medieval Iceland bears the distinction of having preserved invaluable documentation for the history of religion. Although the thirteenth century saw the production of what has been called ‘our first Germanic *Religionsgeschichte*’ (Clunies Ross 1992, 633) – that is, Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* – the early sixteenth century bequeathed to us a monumental Christian hagiography, the so-called *Reykjahólabók*, a codex that may be considered the last of the great medieval legendaries. The compiler of this anthology of twenty-five sacred legends, twenty-two of which were translated from Low German, was Björn Þorleifsson, probably the wealthiest Icelandic landowner of his time. That Björn Þorleifsson was the scribe of the legendary is certain – his hand can be identified from a series of documents written in the period 1501–42; circumstantial, yet nonetheless compelling evidence suggests that he was also the translator (Kalinke 1996, 28–32). The legendary (in the manuscript Stockholm Perg. fol. nr. 3 in the Royal Library, Stockholm) is massive, consisting of 168 leaves in folio with two columns per side.¹ The manuscript is defective: an unknown number of leaves are missing from the front and the back, and there are seven lacunae of one or more leaves (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:ix). The legendary was presumably produced during the fourth decade of the sixteenth century (*Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* 1989, 473), on the eve of the Reformation in Iceland.

The sources of the translated legends in *Reykjahólabók* were long thought to have been the corresponding Low German versions in *Dat Passionael*,² themselves translations of the High German legends in the most popular vernacular legendary of the Middle Ages, *Der Heiligen Leben* (Williams-Krapp 1986, 188–238). Recent scholarship has shown, however, that this is not the case. The sources of the translated legends in *Reykjahólabók* are relatively long Low German legends that are presumed lost, and some, if not all, of the translated legends ultimately derive from the very versions that were condensed for inclusion in *Der Heiligen Leben* (Kalinke 1996, 45–77), where they ended up as ‘abbreviierte, unkommentierte, zumeist auch völlig

enthistorisierte und entrhetorisierte Legendenfassungen,' (abbreviated, not commented upon, mostly also completely dehistoricized and derhetoricized redactions of the legends) as Werner Williams-Krapp (1986, 188) so aptly characterized them. Similarly, Volker Mertens (1979, 287) characterizes the principles of condensation as follows: 'Kürzung auf die Summa facti, Abbau von individualisierenden Darstellungsmomenten, Ausklammerung einer differenzierteren Problematik und im Stilistischen eine vergleichbare Tendenz zur syntaktischen Reihung mit Nivellierung komplexerer Abhängigkeitsverhältnisse' (reduction to a summing up of facts, deletion of individualizing representational aspects, exclusion of a differentiating problematic, and in respect to style a similar tendency to syntactic parataxis with a levelling of more complex hypotactic relations).

Among the more recent saints whose lives are found in *Reykjahólabók* is that of the confessor saint Emperor Henry II, who died in 1024 (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:35–70). Although the historiographic record of Henry's life and reign is rich, the legend transmitted in *Reykjahólabók*, *Hendreks saga og Kunegundis*, combines history and fiction. The heart of the legend is an apocryphal bridal-quest romance that culminates in Henry's marriage to Cunegund of Luxembourg; the couple's vow to practise conjugal chastity; and an ordeal in which Cunegund is cleared of the charge of adultery. The account of Henry's wooing of Cunegund and the story of her ordeal, that is, the apocryphal part of Henry's *vita*, constitute more than two-thirds of the legend and can be read independently of the surrounding narrative. This apocryphal bridal-quest and marital romance has been translated below.³

Within a short time after the death of Emperor Henry II (r. 1002–24), certain aspects of his life relating to his marriage to Cunegund had become fictionalized and been incorporated into hagiographic and liturgical texts (Folz 1984, 87; Folz 1992, 82–93), including the report that Henry and Cunegund led a virginal marriage. This is already found in Leo of Ostia's chronicle of Monte Cassino, which was composed around 1060, and in the *Chronikon Universale*, from the end of the eleventh century, written by Prior Frutolf of Michelsberg, the Benedictine monastery in Bamberg that Henry himself had founded (Klauser 1957, 33). The legend of the imperial couple's conjugal chastity belonged to the material collected in furtherance of Henry's canonization (Guth 1986, 78), and in his bull of 1146 Pope Eugene III proclaimed that Henry 'integritatem castimoniae usque in finem vitae conservavit' (preserved inviolate the purity of chastity until the end of his life) (*Monumenta Germaniae historica*, 4:813b). When Cunegund was subsequently canonized in 1200, Pope Innocent III repeated the

claim of a chaste marriage and furthermore cited the words Henry was supposed to have uttered on his death bed: ‘Qualem eam michi assignastis, talem eam uobis resigno: Virginem eam dedistis et uirginem reddo’ (Just as you entrusted her to me, so I return her to you: You gave her to me a virgin and I return her a virgin) (Petersohn 1977, 24; Cf. Potthast, 1874; *Acta sanctorum*, 1 March, 281b-82a). The bull of canonization furthermore reported that Cunegund submitted to a chastity test in order to prove her innocence of adultery (Petersohn 1977, 24; see also *Acta Sanctorum*, 1 March 282). Compared with historiographic sources, the Latin hagiography produced in furtherance of Henry’s canonization, which subsequently nourished his cult, transmitted a revised, touched-up portrait that moved the saintly couple into the realm of the wondrous and miraculous. In the earliest historiographic records of Henry’s life, produced during his lifetime, that is, in Thietmar’s chronicle (*Monumenta Germaniae historica*, 3:723–871), and in the *Vita Heinrich II imperatoris* by Adalbert of Utrecht (c. 970–1026) (*Monumenta Germaniae historica*, 4:679–95), the figure of the emperor is still depicted in sober, realistic fashion (Klauser 1957, 71). In the *Vita Heinrich* that was composed around 1145, however, which is attributed to a certain Bamberg deacon named Adalbert, Henry’s life entered the realm of hagiography. This is not surprising, given that this *vita* presumably represents the *relatio de vita et miraculis* demanded in the canonization process.⁴ The story of the virginal marriage became extraordinarily elaborated in the supplementary *Vitae S. Heinrich Additamentum*, (*Monumenta Germaniae historica*, 4:816–20), thought to have been composed around 1200; the legend now became a bridal-quest narrative.

The oldest extant vernacular legend of Henry and Cunegund is the metrical version composed by Ebernand von Erfurt around 1220 (ed. Bechstein 1860), and his *Heinrich und Kunegunde* in turn was the ultimate source of the short prose legend in *Der Heiligen Leben* (ed. Brand 1996) and its Low German translation in *Dat Passionael* (‘Van Keyser Hinrik’; ed. Arndes 1492). Ebernand’s legend was considerably reduced for inclusion in *Der Heiligen Leben*. In *Der Heiligen Leben* and *Dat Passionael*, the legends of Henry and Cunegund are separate texts. The narrative of the bridal quest and marriage occurs in the legend of Henry. Although the Icelandic version of the legend, *Hendreks saga og Kunegundis*, like the other translated texts in *Reykjahólabók*, derives demonstrably from a Low German version, the source of the Icelandic legend was a variant version that espoused a pragmatic view of the disadvantages of conjugal chastity. Political and economic considerations compel Henry’s courtiers and Cunegund’s relatives to oppose their desire not to get married. In Henry’s case, the argument goes, a lack of heirs will cause division in the empire and be damaging

to Christendom; in Cunegund's, it will lead to loss of family wealth. The most striking aspect of this legend is that Cunegund's opposition to marriage, indeed, her lack of consent, is given equal weight in the bridal-quest narrative, so that consensuality emerges as a compelling issue in Henry and Cunegund's wedding-night discourse.

The bridal-quest narrative proper in Eberhard's German metrical legend (*Heinrich und Kunegunde*, vv. 732–924) is broadly tripartite, consisting of council scenes in which Henry is advised to seek a wife and Cunegund is identified as an appropriate marital partner; the portrayal of Cunegund and her reluctant agreement to marry Henry; and Henry and Cunegund's conversation during their wedding night. The courtiers' argument for marriage is two-pronged: 1) marriage produces progeny, and 2) the unmarried state is inappropriate for an emperor and will bring about the destruction of the realm. Henry's resistance to marriage obtains from his decision to have Christ as his heir. When Henry finally decides to comply with his courtiers' demands, he places his trust in God in the hope that he will nonetheless be able to observe chastity until death (*Heinrich und Kunegunde*, vv. 791–3). He informs his courtiers that they are to find for him a wife suitable to be empress.

Hendreks saga og Kunegundis attests that a second German author made Henry and Cunegund the subject of a vernacular *vita*. This legend conformed to the one transmitted in *Der Heiligen Leben* with respect to the story of Cunegund's chastity test and certain other elements scattered throughout the legend. As far as the bridal-quest narrative itself is concerned, however, the author substantially expanded the matter found in the *Additamentum* and in Eberhard's version by introducing concerns only hinted at in these texts and by additionally modifying and sharpening the focus on the issue of chastity. Furthermore, being dramatically inclined, the author chose to convey the plot not by means of third-person narrative, as Eberhard mostly did, but through monologue and dialogue.

The bridal-quest portion of *Hendreks saga og Kunegundis* commences after Henry has pacified his entire realm, seen to its governance, and held a great feast. He returns to Rome, and his councillors approach him, concerned about his unmarried state. They point out that matters cannot continue as they are, that he remain unmarried and without heirs; they wish eventually to be subject to his heirs; and they are motivated in their support of him by the knowledge that God is with him:

Verðugasti herra, nú eftir þvíað guð hefir gefið yður so fagran sigur og mikinn, sem þér sjálfir vel vitið, og so hafið þér samið og sett yðvart ríki nú í góðan máta, þá með yðru góðu orlofi, kærasti

herra, höfum vær hugsað um nokkuð efni á yðra vegna að so megi ekki standa að þér eigið ekki drottningu en ríkið erfingjalaust, en vör viljum þó allra helst eiga að vera undirgefnir yðru afkvæmi og vort afspringi, einkanlega þó fyrir þann skyld eigi síður en aðra að vær vitum að guð drottinn er með yður. (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:42.24–32)⁵

[Most gracious lord, now that God has granted you such a fair and great victory, as you yourself well know, and you have thus secured and established your empire in good fashion, therefore, by your good leave, dearest lord, we have thought about a matter concerning you that cannot continue, that you do not have a queen and the empire is without heirs. For we want most of all to be subject to your descendants – as also our heirs – though especially no less for that reason than this other, that we know that the Lord God is with you.]

At first the emperor is silent and sighs, but then he replies that he has as yet not considered this matter, but that he will respond to their concerns at a later date. The councillors leave and nothing more happens for the time being. The emperor continues to turn the matter over in his mind, however, and remembers what he had promised God: ‘hugsar hann og um það hverju að hann hefði lofað guði’ (He also thinks about what he had promised God) (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:43.8–9). Taken out of context, the remark is cryptic, but Henry is referring to an earlier incident, to a dream vision he had experienced before he was crowned emperor.

This incident is reported in Adalbert’s *Vita Heinrici* and it is also included in Ebernand’s vernacular legend. According to Adalbert, Henry had a dream one night in which he found himself in the church of St Emmeram in Regensburg, by the tomb of St Wolfgang. He hears the saint telling him to look at the words written on the wall by his tomb. There he reads: ‘Post sex’ (*Monumenta Germaniae historica*, 4:792). Thinking that this must mean he would die after six days, Henry dispenses alms to the poor. When he does not die, however, he thinks the words must refer to six months, and he begins to fear greatly. Once again nothing happens, and he decides that the reference must be to six years. The years pass and in the seventh year Henry is crowned emperor. He now realizes that the cryptic words had prophesied his consecration as emperor. According to Ebernand, Henry interprets the cryptic message to mean that he should be ready whenever the Lord chooses to call him to himself. The episode concludes with Henry offering his virginity to God (*Heinrich und Kunegunde*, vv. 281–2).

Ebernand does not permit Henry to reflect on the consequences of his vow of chastity, of which the nobles know nothing. In *Hendreks*

saga, however, after the courtiers have broached the subject of marriage for the first time, Henry is given a long soliloquy, expressed in *erlebte Rede*. He is of two minds concerning the decision he should take:

Og væri það so að hann giftist ekki, sem þeir vildu, þá væri það jafn víst að sunduróykkir mundi mikið verða í ríkinu, því að þeir sem megtugir væri og af stórum ættum komnir mundu taka sig upp hver í móti öðrum þegar að hans missti við. En þó víst og þvíست hvort það bíði so lengi og væri það þá mikil ábyrgð fyrir sig við guð ef það bæri til af hans völdum að sá hefði sízt er helzt ætti. Í annan stað setur hann og í sinn hug ef hann verður þeim samóykkur í þessu að þá mundi hann styggja mjög guð er hann rýfur sitt heit er hann hefir lofað – nema hann gæti því so af stað komið að til þeirrar lofunar yrði heldur tveir en einn. Og með það seinasta tekur hann það upp að eiga allt sitt mál undir guði almáttugum. (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:43.10–22)

[And should it be that he did not marry, as they wanted him to, then it would be just as certain that the empire would be greatly torn apart, because those who were powerful and descended from great families would rise up against each other as soon as he was dead. And yet the odds were even whether it would take so long, and he would be greatly answerable to God if it were to happen on his account that someone should obtain the empire who should least have it. On the other hand, he reflects that if he agrees with them in this matter, then he will greatly offend God for breaking the vow he has taken – unless he can bring it about that in respect to this vow there might be two rather than one. And in the end he decides to place his entire case in the hands of almighty God.]

In Henry's ruminations about the quandary he finds himself in and the fact that either decision – to marry or not to marry – will have negative results, the former in his personal relationship with God, the latter in the repercussions to the empire, the author, who of course is writing with hindsight, permits Henry to foresee the political consequences of the virginal marriage to which after his death the lack of heirs was attributed. The problematic nature of Henry's childlessness is reiterated when the courtiers return to inquire what decision the emperor has taken. In Ebernand's version, the encounter between the emperor and the nobles is quite brief; they inform him that it is not fitting for an emperor to be unmarried, for the empire would thereby be destroyed (*Heinrich und Kunegunde*, vv. 778–82).

Their succinct reasoning provokes Henry's decision to consent to what they demand and his expression of trust that God will enable him to preserve his chastity until death (*Heinrich und Kunegunde*, vv. 791–3).

Here too, the author of the Icelandic version stages a drawn-out scene in the corresponding episode. He has a spokesman voice the courtiers' concerns; in fact, he reiterates some of Henry's own previously expressed fears about the probable consequences to the empire should he not marry. When the nobles return to demand an answer to the matter they have raised, Henry thanks them but informs them that he cannot acquiesce, for 'I have promised God to observe chastity my entire life' (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:44.2–3). At this point, one of the nobles addresses him:

Verðugi herra, þér vitið það vel sjálfir að ríkinu kemur það ekki vel fyrir margra hluta skuld so framt sem guð með sinni miskunn vilji gefa yður réttan erfingja til stjórnar heldur en yðvart ríki sundur dreifist til ýmislegra höfðingja, og jafn víst til útlendra sem inlenskra, og veit þá enn enginn fyrir nema heilög kristni fái þá jafn mikinn skaða sem nú hefur hún bata, sem oft hefir skeð að annar hefir bæði eytt og niður brotið guðs kristni sem annar hefir bætt og eft. Og so, verðugi herra, er það ekki heldur alsíða að rómversku keisarar sé hreinlífis menn. Hér með er það og ekki tilheyrilegt að þér einir eigið so ríkið að þér hugsið ekki líka vel fyrir réttum erfingjum og eftirkomendum hverjir að þeir megi verða. Og biðjum vær yður, herra keisari, að þér lítið bæði á yðra nauðsyn og so vora. (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:44.7–19)

[Gracious lord, you yourself know well that this is not for the good of the empire for many reasons, unless God in his mercy will give you a legal heir to govern the empire rather than that your empire is scattered among several rulers, surely both foreigners and those from here, and no one as yet foresees but that Holy Christendom will then incur as great damage as it now has advancement, for it has often happened that one person has both laid waste and destroyed God's Christendom which another has restored and made strong. And also, gracious lord, it is, furthermore, not common practice that Roman emperors observe chastity. In addition, it is also not appropriate that you alone should rule the empire in such a manner without also being concerned about rightful heirs and offspring, whoever they might be. And we ask you, our lord and emperor, that you consider both your need as well as ours.]

Henry's previous, private deliberations concerned his relationship

with God and the effect of his vow on the empire. He realized that without heirs power struggles would ensue upon his death. This very issue is expatiated upon above by the spokesman of the courtiers, who addresses, however, not only secular issues, but also the state of Christendom. He makes it clear to Henry that as emperor he has no right to remain unmarried, for he must consider the royal succession. Only now does Henry give his consent and he asks the courtiers to find for him a wife, 'who is altogether fitting for me and who will be for the good of the empire' (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:44.25).

Henry's decision to marry, despite his vow of virginity, is prompted by his concern for the welfare of the empire and the church. Henry's very extensive interior monologue on the subject and the argument of his nobles is without precedent in either the Latin or German legends. Indeed, Henry's decision to place his trust in God in the hope that two, and not just one, might be able to take a vow of chastity together – 'að til þeirrar lofunar yrði heldur tveir en einn' – is unique. It anticipates not only the mutual decision that Henry and Cunegund are to adopt on their wedding night, but also the issue of consent in marriage that Cunegund is to raise.

At the heart of the German bridal-quest narrative that was the source of *Hendreks saga* are two issues: 1) the consequences of chastity for either partner, in the case of Henry to the empire and the church and in the case of Cunegund, as we shall see, to her patrimony; and 2) the issues of mutual consent to marriage itself and mutual consent to a chaste marriage. This latter problem surfaces when Cunegund enters the narrative. The version represented by the Icelandic saga deviates from all other extant versions of the legend inasmuch as Cunegund is given a much more prominent role; indeed, she forces the issue of perpetual virginity. Henry's ambassadors learn that Cunegund's parents have died and that Cunegund wishes to remain a virgin. They decide to approach her guardians, that is, 'þá sem fyrir hennar ráði átti að sjá' (those who were to make the decision concerning her marriage) (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:45.25–6), in order to present to them their proposal and the emperor's letter and seal. Upon reading the letter, Cunegund's relatives are receptive but say that they wish to inform Cunegund before giving their answer to the marriage proposal (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:45.28–9).

Cunegund is summoned and informed of Henry's letter and proposal, but she replies that this is not what she had in mind (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:45.31–2). Her relatives plead Henry's case by pointing to his great power and majesty, which surpass that of all other kings and lords in Christendom (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:45.32–46.1). While Cunegund is aware of Henry's eminence, she nonetheless states that if she were allowed to decide for herself, she would have no other

bridegroom than the one she has already chosen. Her statement and the ensuing dialogue with the courtiers are extremely significant inasmuch as these touch on the issue of self-determination:

‘Ef ég má sjálfráð vera, þá ætla ég mér ekki annan brúðguma að eiga en þann ég hefir valið mér áður.’ Þá svara þeir og segja að það megi ekki fyrir sakir hennar stórra eigna og annarra auðæfa er henni til heyrði. Hún sagðist þar öngva hugsan á hafa og öngva veraldlega hluti þvíð það væri [ekki] annað nema hégómi einn. Af þessum hennar orðum styggjast þeir og segja að þeir eiga sjá ráð fyrir henni en ekki hún og skuli hún ekki ráða, þvíð með öngu móti, sögðust þeir, vilja það að hennar arfur og góðs eignist nokkur maður nema hún sjálf og hennar afkvæmi. (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:46.3–12)

[‘If I make my own decision, then I do not intend to have any other bridegroom than the one I have already chosen.’ They then answer and say that cannot be, on account of her great possessions and other wealth that belonged to her. She said that she had no thought for these nor for any worldly thing because that was nothing but vanity. At her words they become angry and say that they are the ones who are going to make decisions for her and not she herself, and that she was not going to be the one to decide, for in no way, they said, did they want her inheritance and property to belong to anyone but herself and her heirs.]

The exchange between Cunegund and her relatives raises a central issue in respect to marriage: whether the woman has the right of choice. Cunegund wishes to have *sjálfráð* (self-rule) while her relatives insist that she does not have a right to this, that they are the ones who alone have the decision-making power (*ráð*) and that she therefore may not decide (*ekki ráða*) herself. The author of the legend has constructed Cunegund’s disagreement with her relatives and, as will be seen, her subsequent interaction with Henry in light not only of the position of canonists at the time the legend was developing but also the practice of consensual marriage in southern Germany (Brundage 1987, 187, 194, 264; Elliott 1993, 138, 157). The above exchange also addresses the material consequences of Cunegund’s desire to preserve her virginity. It thus anticipates and hence reflects a real conflict with her brothers, not at the time of the marriage, but subsequently, when she agreed to give up the city of Bamberg, which Henry had presented to her as his morning gift, so that a diocese could be founded there. Henry announced this at an imperial synod on 1 November 1007, where he declared Christ his heir, since he no longer hoped to have

progeny, and announced that his wife's generosity enabled him to do so. This generated not merely protest from Cunegund's brothers, since they therefore had to give up the hope of inheriting her wealth, but also led to protracted feuding between Henry and the house of Luxembourg (*Monumenta Germaniae historica*, 6:354).⁶

That consent to and in marriage was of vital concern for the author of this version of the legend becomes evident in the first encounter between Henry and Cunegund. After her arrival at Henry's court, his councillors remind him to fulfil his promise of marriage, but he first turns to Cunegund and asks 'hvort þetta væri henni til vilja' (whether this was in accordance with her will) (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:46.31). Her reply is frankly negative:

Verðugi herra, með yðru orlofi, hingað til hefir ég aldrei verið þessu samþykkt og eigi heldur jáyrði til gefið, þvíáð ég hefði valið mér annan unnasta, ef ég hefði sjálfráða verið. En nú, kærasti herra, síðan að ég er hér komin, þá legg ég mig og mitt mál á yðvart vald. (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:46.32–47.3)

[Gracious lord, by your leave, until now I have never been in agreement with this nor have I given my consent, for I would have chosen for myself another beloved, if I had made my own decision. But now, dearest lord, since I have come here, I place myself and my case in your hands.]

It is significant that Henry inquires as to whether Cunegund has given her consent to the marriage. Cunegund's unwillingness to marry was already an issue in the *Vitae S. Heinrici Additamentum*. There we are told that when she hears about the proposal, she becomes exceedingly sad and starts to cry because 'regi angelorum iam sibi sponsum elegerat, regi Romanorum licet inclito nubere recusabat' (she had already chosen the king of the angels as her spouse and was permitted to refuse to marry the illustrious king of the Romans) (*Additamentum*, 817, a). Her relatives adduce various arguments, however, 'ut imperatori tam glorioso nubere non recusaret' (that she should not refuse to marry such a renowned emperor), and in the end Cunegund commends herself to God in the hope 'quod ipse, cui subest cum voluerit posse, etiam in coniugio sibi posite florem pudicie sue, ne marcesceret, posset conservare' (that he within whose power it lies to do so, when he wishes, may be able to preserve the flower of her chastity for her so that it not wilt, even though she is married). She agrees to the marriage, yet, the narrator adds, 'non animo volenti' (not willingly) (*Additamentum*, 817, b). This 'non animo volenti' may have inspired the author of the source of *Hendreks saga* to develop the

narrative so as to make consent to marriage a central issue not only for Cunegund but also for Henry. This is found neither in the *Additamentum*, however, nor in Ebernand's metrical legend, where Cunegund's unwillingness remains just that, a comment by the narrating author. The question of consent is not raised by either partner.

Once the author of *Hendreks saga* – reference to the 'author' of *Hendreks saga* is also in every case a reference to the author of its German antecedent – permits the emperor to inquire whether Cunegund has assented, and he has received her negative response, the stage is set for pursuing the issue during the wedding night. Henry's first words to her in bed are as follows:

'Kæri jungfrú,' segir hann, 'ég hefir nokkuð hugsað eftir því orði er þér svöruðuð mér svá látanda að þú hefðir útvalið einn annan þér til unnasta ef þú hefðir ráðið. Og vil ég að þér viljið láta mig vita hver að sá er. Kann vera að yður skuli það ekki til styggingar vera, þó ég viti það með yður.' (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:47.12–17)

[‘Dear maiden,’ he says, ‘I have reflected somewhat on the response you gave me, to the effect that you would have chosen another as your beloved if you had decided yourself. And I wish that you will let me know who that is. It may be that this will not be a stumbling block for you, should I too know of it.’]

Henry's inquiry, upon meeting Cunegund, whether she has consented to the marriage, and her reply at that time, subsequently provoked the above question. Once the issue of consent has been injected into the legend, the wedding-night conversation perforce proceeds in a manner quite different from that reported by the *Additamentum* and Ebernand. In the Latin legend, which one may consider the prototype, Cunegund is given no voice until the wedding night, but even then it is Henry who initiates the conversation. Addressing Cunegund as 'sponsa mea carissima' (my dearest bride/spouse), Henry informs her of his vow of virginity, which then gives her the opportunity to let him know that she has taken a similar vow (*Additamentum*, 817, b). In his response to Cunegund, Henry refers to their mutual will and consent to a virginal marriage:

O amica mea, sponsa mea, immaculata mea, revera Dominus est in medio nostri, qui nos unius voluntatis et propositi in suo nomine fecit convenire, qui est refugium nostrum et virtus. Unanimi consensu iam ipsi nos ipsos offeramus pollicentes, quod propter eius amorem omnibus diebus vite nostre celibem vitam

[O my beloved, my spouse, my pure one, truly the Lord is in our midst, who has brought us together in his name with one will and intent, who is our refuge and our strength. One in mind, let us now offer ourselves to him, promising that for love of him we shall observe chastity all the days of our lives.]

While consent surfaces in the Latin legend, it is solely in respect to the mutual decision to observe conjugal chastity.

Throughout the Latin legend, and this is also the case in Ebernand's version, Henry is given the lead. In the wedding-night scene, Henry tells Cunegund of his vow (*Heinrich und Kunegunde*, vv. 897–903); she responds that she has also vowed virginity; and Henry proposes that they observe conjugal chastity. Surprisingly, Ebernand's legend does not capture the telling phrases 'unius voluntatis et proposito' and 'unanimi consensu' above. Henry simply says: 'My lady, I want to promise you one thing, and you should promise me the same, that we will live chastely' (*Heinrich und Kunegunde*, vv. 942–5). Ebernand's Henry rather peremptorily enjoins Cunegund to promise him to observe conjugal chastity. In *Hendreks saga*, however, the issues of consent and self-determination continue to dominate the narrative so that the wedding-night discourse is quite different. Furthermore, because Henry had inquired as to the meaning of Cunegund's words when she first met him, she is the one to initiate the couple's consideration of conjugal chastity. In other words, the issue of consent to marriage has led to a restructuring of the wedding-night conversation: it is not Henry who raises the subject of chastity but Cunegund. She says:

Minn kærasti herra, með yðru lofi til að segja, þá hefði ég gjarnan hreinlífi halda ef ég hefði so mátt gjöra. En mínir frændur sem fyrir mínu ráði þóttust eiga sjá vildu það ekki, einkanlega síðan þeir fengu yðvart bréf og boð og sendu mig með þessu til yðvar. Og ég er nú komin á yðra náð bæði um þetta og so allt annað á mína vegna. (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:47.20–5)

[My dearest lord, by your leave if I may speak, I had very much wanted to observe chastity, if I had been allowed to do so. But my relatives, who thought that they had to provide for my marriage, did not want that, especially once they received your letter and proposal, and accordingly they sent me to you. And now I am at

your mercy both in respect to this and everything else pertaining to me.]

Henry replies that he, too, had intended to preserve his virginity, but that he had consented to marriage because of the urging of powerful nobles and friends. Nonetheless, he continues, ‘setta ég mitt öruggt traust til míns drottins að hann mundi senda mér þá til handa er ég mætti ráða við’ (I placed my sure trust in my Lord that he would send me someone with whom I could agree on this) (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:47.28–30). That is to say, Henry reveals to Cunegund that he had asked God to send him a wife whom he could consult about the possibility of observing conjugal chastity. Henry now exhorts Cunegund: ‘Og ef so er, kæri jungfrú, að þín vili er sem minn, þá viljum við bæði lofa guði að halda hreinlífi alla okkara daga meðan við lifum’ (And if this be so, dear maiden, that your will is as mine, then let us both promise God to observe chastity as long as we live) (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:47.30–2). The episode concludes with Henry and Cunegund taking each other by the hand and promising ‘God and each other to observe chastity as long as they lived. And they praised God and his blessed mother Mary for this, and they agreed that no one should know about this but they alone’ (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:48.5–7). It is not clear whether the final clause is part of the vow or not; even if it is not included, the words nonetheless indicate that Henry and Cunegund are in agreement that their vow should remain a secret. The *Additamentum* does not contain this stipulation; it first appears in Ebernand’s legend (*Heinrich und Kunegunde*, v. 951).

It has been suggested that Henry’s prayer on his deathbed – ‘Hanc ecce, inquit, michi a vobis, immo per Christum consignatam, ipsi Christo domino nostro et vobis resigno virginem vestram’ (‘Behold,’ he said, ‘the one given to me by you, indeed by Christ, I now return to Christ our Lord and to you a virgin’) (*Vita Heinrichi*, 810) – indeed, the story of his virginal marriage is reminiscent of Gregory of Tours’s story of the two lovers in the *Historia Francorum*, that is, the tale of the chaste marriage of Injuriosus and his wife, both the sole children of wealthy parents (Schröpfer 1969, 24, n. 28). When she precedes him in death, according to Gregory, Injuriosus prayed: ‘Gratias tibi ago, domine Iesu Christi, aeternae domine deus noster, quia hunc thesaurum, sicut a te commendatum accepi, ita immaculatum pietati tuae restituo’ (I thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, Master, and eternal God, for granting that I may hand back to your loving care this treasure as unsullied as when I received her from your hands) (*Historia Francorum*, 1:47; trans. 97).⁷ The similarity of Henry’s deathbed prayer and Injuriosus’s at the grave of his wife is striking. Injuriosus’s prayer had already found its way into Henry’s legend several decades

before the *Additamentum* was composed, for Leo of Ostia cites it in his chronicle of Monte Cassino.⁸ Gregory's tale may have inspired more than Henry's prayer, however; it may also have inspired other aspects of the German legend of Henry and Cunegund that has been transmitted in Icelandic translation.

Gregory's tale consists of little more than the wedding-night conversation between the couple; in fact, the major portion of the dialogue is given to the bride, who remains nameless throughout. The conversation is generated by the fact that the bride starts to cry and Injuriosus asks her the reason for this. There follows a long response in which she tells him that she had determined to preserve her body for Christ, untainted by the touch of any man. In a passionate lament the bride wishes that she had died at birth. Injuriosus responds that each of them is an only child and that their parents wanted them to marry so that their respective families would not die out, permitting strangers to inherit their wealth – 'ad propagandam generationem coniungere voluerunt, ne recedentibus de mundo succederet heres extraneus' (they have planned this marriage for us to produce children, so that when they are dead no heir from outside our families may claim the succession) (*Historia Francorum* I, 47; 96). The bride responds, however: 'Nihil est mundus, nihil sunt divitiae, nihil est pompa saeculi huius, nihil est vita ipsa quam fruemur' [This earthly existence of ours is of no value. Wealth is of no value, the pomp and circumstance of this world is of no value, the very life we enjoy is of no value] (*Historia Francorum* I, 47; 96). Convinced by her fervent words, Injuriosus responds: 'Si vis a carnali abstinere concupiscentiam, particeps tuae mentis efficiar' (If you are determined to abstain from intercourse with me, then I will agree to what you want to do) (*Historia Francorum* I, 47; 96).

There are striking echoes of Gregory's tale in *Hendreks saga*, where Cunegund, like the maiden in Gregory's tale, is given such a prominent role. At issue in the story of Injuriosus is the extirpation of a family through lack of progeny and the question of inheritance. As is the case with Cunegund's family, the parents of Injuriosus and his bride do not wish their wealth to be expropriated. Then too the lovers' conversation concludes with the mutual decision to lead a virginal marriage, the initiative for which comes from the bride, as Injuriosus's final words confirm: 'Faciam quae hortaris' (I will do as you request) (*Historia Francorum* I, 47; 97). While there is no certain evidence that Gregory of Tours's affecting tale was a source for this part of the legend of Henry and Cunegund, it nonetheless offers evidence for the existence of a model that may have inspired the author of the German legend represented by *Hendreks saga* to restructure and refocus the legend of Henry and Cunegund as transmitted in the *Additamentum*.

The German legend transmitted in *Hendreks saga og Kunegundis* is unique. It is remarkable for voicing secular and ecclesiastical concerns attendant upon a childless marriage. Both Henry and his courtiers are aware of the potential negative consequences to the empire and the church should Henry not marry. Similarly, Cunegund's relatives force her into marriage so that her patrimony will not be expropriated. Only the Icelandic version injects the notion of consent to marriage into the narrative; for this reason only in this version is Cunegund given the opportunity by Henry to initiate the conversation during the wedding night that is to lead to their mutual decision to observe conjugal chastity. While it is true that 'much of the familiar rhetoric of consensuality and mutual sanctification resurfaces in the *vita* that was written at the time of Innocent III's bull of canonization' (Elliott 1993, 130), only the Icelandic version draws the ultimate consequences of consensuality in constructing the story of Henry and Cunegund's marriage.

Alone among the Latin and vernacular accounts of the life of Henry II, *Hendreks saga* transmits a version of the bridal-quest narrative that focuses on consensuality in marriage. The author of the German source of *Hendreks saga* was very much concerned with the consequences of conjugal chastity in respect to government and personal property. Furthermore, the issue of consent – to marriage and to conjugal chastity – was uppermost in his mind, and this concern took centre stage in the encounter between Henry and Cunegund. The author of this version undertook a substantial revision of the received legend and recast the bridal-quest and marital narratives so as to focus on Cunegund and the issue of consent in marriage.

The extraordinary German version of the legend of Henry and Cunegund that radically modified the story of Henry's bridal quest and the couple's wedding night no longer exists – except in Icelandic translation. It is not known how Björn Þorleifsson, who produced *Reykjahólabók*, acquired the German sources of the legends he translated; nor is it possible to ascertain whether he had available a Low German legendary or a group of separate legends. What happened to his sources, once he had translated them, is a mystery as is the disappearance of the very works themselves. The long German legend of Henry and Cunegund, with its unique focus on consensuality in marriage, is known today only because by a quirk of fate it fell into the hands of the compiler of *Reykjahólabók*.

The Translation

The translation below consists of the bridal-quest and marital romance⁹ of Henry and Cunegund,¹⁰ which can be read as a more or less independent narrative. This part of the legend is the apocryphal tale that developed in furtherance of Henry's canonization. The language of *Reykjahólabók* is a strange amalgam of early modern Icelandic and late Middle Low German in respect to lexicon and syntax. Like the other translations in the legendary, *Hendreks saga og Kunegundis* is a difficult text because of its idiosyncratic lexicon and syntax. While the translation from Low German into Icelandic is for the most part accurate, it is not elegant, for all too frequently the translation is word-for-word rather than idiomatic.

Some of the lexicon retains a distinctly Low German meaning, for example, the Low German loan *reisa* (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:42.21; 50.31), which I have translated as 'military expedition' rather than 'journey' or 'trip.' The former is one of the meanings of the word in Low German (Veturlíði Óskarsson 2003, 307–8, Westergård-Nielsen 1946, 274–5), but in the sense of 'military expedition' the word appears to be attested only in *Reykjahólabók* (it also occurs several times in *Ósvalds saga* [*Reykjahólabók*, 1:80.8, 80.11, 85.19], the legend of King Oswald of Northumbria). Similarly, the word *mak* in the phrase *heimuglegt mak* occurs in *Hendreks saga* (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:51.22–3) with a previously unattested meaning in Icelandic. While this Low German loan is found in sixteenth-century Icelandic imprints, it had the meaning of 'peace,' 'quiet' (Veturlíði Óskarsson 2003, 280; Westergård-Nielsen 1946, 212). Here, however, the word transmits a second meaning of Low German *mak*, that is, 'room,' 'chamber.' Similarly, the adjective *heimuglegt* is a borrowing from Low German *hemelik* 'intimate,' 'private,' 'secret' (Westergård-Nielsen 1946, 153). Thus I translate *heimuglegt mak* as 'private chamber.'¹¹

Since the beginning of narrative in Iceland, shifts of tense within a scene or even a sentence have been the norm. This can be problematic in translation. Where acceptable, that is, where a tense shift does not grate too much on one's ears, this has been retained in translation. Every so often, the translator appears to lose control over syntax – a negative particle appears where it is not warranted or a dangling dependent clause occurs – yet context permits us to understand what he means. In those instances the translation quietly repairs the damage. In a couple of egregious cases I have supplied a note identifying the problem.

The Saga of Henry and Cunegund

Now when the emperor had returned to Rome, as was said before, he has a great court celebration arranged. He has all the lords who had travelled with him invited to his feast, and he thanks them exceedingly for their help¹² and grants each generous leave to return to his kingdom. And when the emperor had rested for a while after the long military expedition, then on one occasion some of the most powerful men in Rome assembled one time and went before the emperor and spoke to him in these words:

‘Most gracious lord, now that God has granted you such a fair and great victory, as you yourself well know, and you have thus secured and established your empire in good fashion, therefore, by your good leave, dearest lord, we have thought about a matter concerning you that cannot continue, that you do not have a queen and the empire is without heirs. For we want most of all to be subject to your descendants – as also our heirs – though especially no less for that reason than this other, that we know that the Lord God is with you.’

And when the emperor had heard their words and speech as well as the firm decision they wished him to take, he became silent and sighed somewhat heavily, and then spoke:

‘Dear friends, I would not have thought that you would at this time propose such a thing, for I have not yet given any thought to such a matter. And I shall give you an answer to this at a later time.’

With that they leave again, and they do not receive any other answer. Some time now passed while the emperor thinks about this matter a great deal, for very many things come to mind about the lords, that since they had raised such a matter, it was just as certain that more must be in the planning if they did not prevail in this, especially since no one had brought up these matters before with them on his behalf; and in the second instance, he also thinks about what he had promised God. For both these reasons the emperor was very anxious about what he ought to decide. And should it be that he did not marry, as they wanted him to, then it would be just as certain that the empire would be greatly torn apart, because those who were powerful and descended from great families would rise up against each other as soon as he was dead. And yet the odds were even whether it would take so long, and he would be greatly answerable to God if it were to happen on his account that someone should obtain the empire who should least have it. On the other hand, he reflects that if he agrees with them in this matter, then he will greatly offend God for breaking the vow he has taken – unless he can bring it about that in respect to this vow there might be two rather than one. And in the end he decides to place his entire case in the hands of almighty

God.

Chapter 5

Now when the lords think the time has come for the emperor to have thought about that matter and the empire's needs, about which they had spoken to him before, they settle on a day when they should meet and go to the emperor to find out what answer he was going to give them about this. And when the time had come, they go before the emperor and ask leave to meet with him and find out his final answer concerning the matter they had raised with him earlier. And when the emperor hears what their business is, he remains silent for a time, and then he has them called in to him, and he spoke:

'Dear friends,' he says, 'I have thought about your business, and I find that your case has been made as well as possible, and for this we give you many thanks. And yet we can hardly give you an answer so that it will come to pass, because I have promised God to observe chastity my entire life.'

Then they said they had not known that, and asked the emperor to give consideration to this. And he said that he would gladly do so, but he thought that they would let things rest and not raise the matter again. But this was not so, for as soon as the emperor had replied, one of them spoke up and said:

'Gracious lord, you yourself know well that this is not for the good of the empire for many reasons, unless God in his mercy will give you a legal heir to govern the empire rather than that your empire is scattered among several rulers, surely both foreigners and those from here, and no one as yet foresees but that Holy Christendom will then incur as great damage as it now has advancement, for it has often happened that one person has both laid waste and destroyed God's Christendom which another has restored and made strong. And also, gracious lord, it is, furthermore, not common practice that Roman emperors observe chastity. In addition, it is also not appropriate that you alone should rule the empire in such a manner without also being concerned about rightful heirs and offspring, whoever they might be. And we ask you, our lord and emperor, that you consider both your need as well as ours.'

Now that the emperor has fully understood their plea and absolute will, he thinks to himself that this would thereupon turn out in every way as he had previously thought, and he says to them:

'Now, dear friends, since you think that I should marry, I ask all of you to obtain for me a wife who is altogether fitting for me and who will be for the good of the empire.'

They say that they intend to do so and they now become very glad at this response from the emperor. And they leave, each for his own

quarters, and believe that much good has been accomplished.

After some days have passed, they again go before the emperor and tell him that they have thought about the matter he charged them with, and they say now that they have heard of an excellent maiden, whose like would hardly be found no matter where one might search in respect to all the qualities it behooved a woman to have, and her name is Cunegund. The emperor says that he wants to follow their advice, and he asks them to see to this themselves.

Chapter 6

Now there is to be told that in Saxland¹³ there was an excellent and good Christian lord whose name was Siegfried and he was a count. His lady and wife was called Hedwig. This couple loved God well and kept his commandments along with fasting and prayers and generous alms giving. They also had a precious daughter who was endowed with all good qualities, and not only in respect to good manners but also godly and merciful works towards all those who asked her for any help. This maiden was called Cunegund, who was mentioned earlier. The aforesaid lords dispatch letters and honourable messengers on behalf of the emperor to Count Siegfried to ask for the hand of his daughter in marriage for the emperor.

And when the messengers arrived in Saxland, they travelled up the Rhine until they came to a city called Basel, in which city the aforementioned count was wont to reside. But when they arrived in the city, they were told that both the count and his wife had died, and that Cunegund, their daughter, was with relatives. And word reached them that she wanted to observe chastity as long as she lived. On account of this they become quite distressed and then consult each other as to what they should do, whether to sail home as things stand or try their luck with the guardians of the maiden. And they ended up, in accordance with God's design, deciding to seek out those who were to make the decision concerning her marriage, and to deliver to them their proposal together with the emperor's letter and seal. And when they had read the emperor's letter, they respond well to the proposal, but say that they first wanted to inform her about their mission before they gave a final answer. The messengers are pleased at this.

Thereupon her relatives have her called into their presence and they inform her of the letter and the emperor's message, but she said that she did not have a mind to do this. But they pursued the emperor's offer all the more and counted up for her his great might and the high position he held above all other kings and lords in Christendom.

'That person would then be great,' she said, 'who is subject to this good lord, but to tell you the truth, if I may make my own decision, then I do not intend to have any other bridegroom than the one I have

already chosen.'

They then answer and say that cannot be, on account of her great possessions and other wealth that belonged to her. She said that she had no thought for these nor for any worldly thing because that was nothing but vanity. At her words they become angry and say that they are the ones who are going to make decisions for her and not she herself, and that she was not going to be the one to decide, for in no way, they said, did they want her inheritance and property to belong to anyone but herself and her heirs.

She then leaves them, in silence, but on their part they go and meet the emperor's emissaries and tell them that what the emperor has proposed is now in his hands, and that the maiden is to go with them. The emissaries thank the lords for their help and support in this matter, and they are now glad. After that they have the maiden sent for, and this was done. She was then betrothed to the emperor as his wife, against her will. She then goes to the ship together with her maid-in-waiting, but with great sorrow and much weeping. They then set sail and they have a good wind so that they do not lower their sails until they reach Italy, and there they obtain wagons and other carriages that they needed to head for Rome. There they are received well, as was expected.

No time is lost in telling the emperor that his betrothed has arrived. He does not show any reaction to this. After all of this, the aforesaid lords go to the emperor and have the maiden brought before him. And he receives them and her with friendly mien and offers them a seat. And after they have sat for a short while, they once more bring up their concern to the emperor and ask him now to fulfil his promise. The emperor says he will do so. He then asks the maiden whether this was in accordance with her will. She answers:

'Gracious lord, by your leave, until now I have never been in agreement with this nor have I given my consent, for I would have chosen for myself another beloved, if I had made my own decision. But now, dearest lord, since I have come here, I place myself and my case in your hands.'

The emperor thanks her and now rejoices somewhat in his heart at her words. Thereupon the emperor has an excellent feast prepared and he invites to it both the lords and all the mighty men who were in the vicinity. This feast proceeded in all splendour as was to be expected and all were dismissed with precious gifts.

Chapter 7

Now we must turn to what happened between the bridegroom Emperor Henry and the maiden Cunegund. When they had come to bed according to general custom and as was appropriate to their

station, and everyone had left them, the emperor speaks to her, saying thus:

‘Dear maiden,’ he says, ‘I have reflected somewhat on the response you gave me, to the effect that you would have chosen another as your beloved if you had decided yourself. And I wish that you will let me know who that is. It may be that this will not be a stumbling block for you, should I too know of it.’

‘Dearest lord, my situation has now come to this, that I can hardly reveal it, even though I wanted to rather than not.’

He asks her not to conceal what she wants. She then tells him and says: ‘My dearest lord, by your leave if I may speak, I had very much wanted to observe chastity, if I had been allowed to do so. But my relatives, who thought that they had to provide for my marriage, did not want that, especially once they received your letter and proposal, and accordingly they sent me to you. And now I am at your mercy both in respect to this and everything else pertaining to me.’

The emperor answers: ‘Dear maiden,’ he says, ‘be comforted, for I had thought to do the same, but because of the urging of powerful chieftains and my friends I agreed with them to get married, and I placed my sure trust in my Lord that he would send me someone with whom I could agree on this. And if this be so, dear maiden, that your will is as mine, then let us both promise God to observe chastity as long as we live.’

‘Gladly, dearest lord,’ she says, ‘for I would rather have heard these words from you than that you had given me many kingdoms.’¹⁴

‘God be praised,’ says the emperor, ‘that he has seen fit to give us to each other in marriage and that we are able to live freely according to our desire.’

‘So be it,’ she says. Thereupon they take each other’s hands and they promised God and each other to observe chastity as long as they lived. And they praised God and his blessed mother Mary for this, and they agreed that no one should know about this but they alone. And from then on the emperor loves her so dearly and she him that neither a cross word nor deed passed between them for a long time – until the enemy of all mankind sowed his evil between them, as you will hear later.¹⁵

...

Chapter 9

When Emperor Henry and his esteemed queen Cunegund thus promoted God’s Christendom, as was told before, and performed many other works of mercy in God’s sight – all of which would be too long to tell about or to write about or set down in a book – with the

delightful love and pure affection that each had for the other, it is told of them that the emperor was never gone for as long as three days without one of them either sending a letter or a message to the other, and there was nothing that one of them wanted that was not to both their liking. And as soon as he came home, they were immediately at each other's side, for each other's delight and joy in the sight of men.

The enemy hated all of this and on his part prepared his wiles with multifarious cunning in order to sow some discord between them, so that their angelic love of chastity might be destroyed. And he tempted them with great vehemence to sexual lust, but with God's help they were able to resist this torment and temptation of the devil. And when the fiend realizes that his temptations do not work, he adopts a different plan and attacks them with the evil thought that neither of them would be faithful to the other as they had vowed. This too went as before, so that he is not able to work his evil as he wants on account of the steadfast love that each bore the other. But on his part the devil does not want to cease his habit of bringing about evil if he can and God does not want to prevent this. And once again he sharpens his missile of falsehood against these persons, the emperor and the queen, and now he does not come short in either will or deed.

He changes his shape into the figure of a young man who is handsome in both figure and other good looks as also in dress, and thus he plans his trickery. Early one morning, when few people had got up, it seems to those who are up and about that a handsome knight comes out of the queen's chamber and everything seems to indicate that he had slept the night there, and he sneaks into a corner so that no one should see him, and he does this as though out of cleverness. And none of those who thought they saw this dared let it seem that they noticed.

The next morning the young man does the same except that now it is both brighter and thus more people are afoot than the previous day. And he now runs quickly as though he wants to hide himself. And he thinks that things are going well, for he gets many to side with him and slander the queen, and abuse and suspicion are heaped on her. And it turns out that many talked about this quietly with others, even though they did not dare bring this up in public. Thus it went for some time. Then this enemy came back a third time as before and he now has all doubt removed, for he does not care to conceal himself any longer and walks about during the fully bright day so that all who want can see him as he leaves the queen's chamber, where she slept, as though he had just got up.

People began to wonder greatly at this, for all who saw him were prepared to swear that it had been some well-known knight who had left her. News of this quickly spread over the whole city, so that most

people began to harbour suspicion about her, and there was no shielding her so that this was not accompanied by cruel rumours, so that it did not take long before it reached her own ears. But she endured this humbly, with a sincere and pure forbearance, no matter what she heard whispered and she did not pay attention to this. The emperor was at this point not home, however, for he had been abroad for much of the year. And this was now near the time when he was expected to come home.

Then it happened, as with all other worldly matters, that the emperor's journey came to an end, and he came home from his long expedition. At once he was told this most wicked rumour, that the queen was supposed to have loved another man while he was away. He becomes very quiet at this, yet answers and says: 'My God would never permit something like this to happen.'

'That is not so,' they say, 'for there are some who have seen the same man leave her chamber on three mornings.' And they say many other things to him, so that at last he comes to put complete faith in their talk, so much so that he decides with his whole mind and heart to divorce himself from her completely, and not to show her any honour or esteem or any joy as he had done formerly.

Queen Cunegund hears this and is very distressed at this, but she nonetheless places all her firm trust in the power of almighty God, and she asked him with her whole heart to be with her and to free her from the false charge brought against her by everyone and especially her lord Emperor Henry, just as he freed Susanna from false accusation. And even though she had great sorrow in her heart, she nevertheless decided not to offend her lord by stepping into his sight as long as his anger did not abate. And for a long time she did not go out of her private chamber, so that none should increase their sin even more if they did not see her. And when things had gone like this for some time, that neither of them wanted to meet the other, she then trusts firmly in God's help and her own clear conscience that she was pure and innocent of this lie, and she then takes courage and goes alone to the emperor in his private chamber, when no one was near him, and she falls on her knees and wished him a good day. But he did not answer her nor did he rise to meet her as he was wont to do.

Then the queen spoke: 'Dearest lord,' she says, 'what has happened to you that you are so silent, or what have I done to you that you are angry at me?'

The emperor answers and says: 'You yourself know that best and also what you have done.'

She answers: 'My lord, I know of nothing that I have done that I should have brought on your anger. But if I have been accused of something that has made you angry with me, I am innocent of this,

and I ask you, lord, that you temper your anger against me and be comforted, for with God's help I shall think up a good plan that will work.'

'What is that?' he says.

She answers: 'Have the mightiest and wisest men in the city of Rome convened and appoint them all to be judges concerning this matter, and whatever they find against me in their judgment, I shall carry out with complete humility.'

When he heard her words, he did not answer but walked away from her in silence. Nonetheless, what she proposed he has done. The queen is told that the emperor had sent for a group of lords, but no one knew what his intentions were in respect to them. 'So be it, my dears,' she says, and then she fell to the ground and asked God to be with her now in her affliction.

Now when these lords had assembled, the emperor speaks to them, saying: 'Dear friends, my wife Cunegund has become the subject of terrible gossip to the effect that she has loved another man and has been unfaithful to me.'

They answer: 'If that is so, lord, that this charge can be proved against her, then we ought to pass such a judgment on her so that other women who do such a thing will be able to recognize themselves, and, lord, we want you to have her come here.'

This was done. When she had arrived, the emperor spoke to them: 'I ask you to pronounce sentence on this woman for each claim that she must be charged with for the crime that she has committed against me.'

They say that they first want to hear her answer. But they got no answer out of her, only great grief and bitter weeping. Then the lords who sat in judgment said: 'What else is there to do,' they say, 'when she does not want to reject the charges, but that she will have to accept the judgment.'

The emperor said that this should be and asked them to judge. They thought this was terrible and they now looked at her and saw that she was very distressed and then looked at each other, until finally they all spoke to the emperor as with one voice:

'Lord,' they said, 'get yourself other men to pass judgment about this on the queen, for we are not going to pronounce any judgment.'

But they did this because they were distressed with her at her great distress. Then the emperor was somewhat taken aback at this. But Cunegund stepped onto the floor before the lords and spoke:

'May God reward you all for not wanting to judge me, a sinful woman, on account of your kindness. But I want to ask all of you to understand my words and look on my wretchedness and have mercy on me for the false charge brought against me, for I know myself to be

innocent of this deed before God. But because my lord and, moreover, all others have lately been angry at me and have harboured wicked suspicion, I myself want to pronounce sentence on me: You are to have twelve swords taken and all made red hot, and I will walk across them all in my bare feet and thus prove my innocence before all men.'

And when the lords heard her words, they said: 'Truly she offers an appropriate ordeal for herself.' But many were so distressed for her that they wept openly, and they spoke: 'She certainly is innocent with respect to the sentence that she has now herself passed on herself.'

Then the swords were taken and made red hot so that sparks flew from them. After that they were taken into the emperor's chapel, which still stands outside, close to the cathedral that is consecrated to St Peter, for that is where she was to undergo the ordeal. Nearly all the lords and retainers who were in the city came there, and there were also two bishops there who led Queen Cunegund in. And when she came into the chapel and saw the swords lying on the floor before her, she raised her eyes humbly and with a broken heart to almighty God, speaking thus:

'Hear me, Lord Jesus Christ, you know the hearts of all men and you are the creator of heaven and earth. You also know my heart and know that I am innocent of this charge brought against me. Therefore I ask you, my sweet Lord, that you grant your mercy to me, your sorrowful handmaiden and wretched friend, in this my affliction and great need.'

Now when the emperor hears the queen's words and sees how fiercely the swords have been made to glow, he became distressed at this and thought that she would burn to death on them, and he said that he would rather grant her mercy and not have her undergo this monstrous pain that he realized she would have to endure. And he spoke these words to her:

'Look here, woman, I will withdraw my charge against you, because I do not want to have you undergo such pain as will now occur.' Many rejoiced at these words of the emperor, since they thought that she would want to accept what the emperor offered. But this was by no means so, for instead she answered him thus:

'Esteemed lord,' she says, 'what kind of an offer is this but in mockery and for the complete disgrace of all those who have brought this charge against me, and this is also the case for me if I do not carry out the sentence that I myself have passed on me.'

And then she stepped onto the floor where the swords lay, and she made the sign of the cross over herself and stepped onto the swords and spoke:

'Hear me, my lord Jesus Christ, help me now in all my distress and torment, for I am innocent to this very day of worldly delights of the

flesh and sexual intercourse with Emperor Henry and all other men in this world, both living and dead.’

Then the emperor got angry at her and struck a mighty blow on her neck and he gave her another on the mouth and on the nose so that blood poured down on her, because he was displeased that she mentioned him in her oath with all the others. But she pulled off a scarf she had around her neck, and it was simple and made of silk, and pressed it against her nose, and even today that blood still looks as if it had freshly bled.¹⁶ And after a short while, the emperor began to repent greatly that he had done her this injustice. Then a voice was heard speaking to her, saying this as she walked towards the swords and after the emperor had slapped her:

‘Rejoice now in your virginal purity and have patience, though you have been maligned, and go fearlessly over the whole row of swords, for the Virgin Mary, the purest maiden, will be with you.’

And when she was about to step onto the eleventh sword, she set the other foot on the twelfth sword, and then she stood on them until they were as cold as snow. And as soon as she had fulfilled her oath, the swords sank altogether into the ground so that they were no longer to be seen from then on. After this miracle, all said that she was innocent. And the emperor himself fell on his knees and spoke to her:

‘Dear lady,’ he said, ‘for the sake of God forgive me the crime I have committed against you, for I want to make up to you for this as much as I can.’

She answers: ‘My good lord, ask God to forgive you this, for you already have my good will.’

Then all who were there rejoiced and praised God for his mercy that he showed to all. For the ugly rumour and suspicion that the fiend was able to arouse in men about her with the treacherous falsehoods that he had spread among them now turned to her honour and advancement with God’s help. And from now on she was honoured and deemed a virgin, as Henry himself was later to attest.¹⁷

NOTES

- 1 The manuscript was edited by Agnete Loth in two volumes, *Reykjahólabók: Íslandske helgenlegender*, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ, A, 15–16 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1969–70). The text in the printed edition comes to 872 pages. Subsequent references are abbreviated *Reykjahólabók*.

- 2 The theory gained currency in the twentieth century through two publications by Hans Bekker-Nielsen and Ole Widding (Bekker-Nielsen and Widding 1960, 1962). Agnete Loth espoused the same position in her edition of *Reykjahólabók* (1:xxxvi).
- 3 In *Reykjahólabók* the legend of Henry and Cunegund is a continuous narrative. In the German legendaries, that is, in *Der Heiligen Leben* and *Dat Passionael*, Cunegund's life after the death of Henry is presented as a separate legend.
- 4 'Adalberti Vita Heinrici II. Imperatoris,' *Monumenta Germaniae historica*, 4:792–816. Adalbert was the first to report that the emperor 'solum quippe Deum sibi elegit heredem' (thus chose God as his sole heir); that he had not consummated his marriage to Cunegund; and that Cunegund was falsely accused of adultery at the instigation of the devil and consequently underwent an ordeal to clear her name (4:805). See Klauser 1957, 72.
- 5 In respect to orthography, lexicon, and syntax, the language of *Reykjahólabók* is a strange amalgam of early Modern Icelandic and late Middle Low German. The excerpts from *Hendreks saga* have been normalized to correspond to modern Icelandic orthography, although some of the consistent idiosyncrasies of the text have been allowed to stand, such as the orthography of the first person plural pronoun, that is, *vær*, rather than *vér*; or the consistent use of *kæri* in the feminine vocative, where one would expect *kæra*.
- 6 See Schneidmüller 2001, Pflafka 2001; see also Kirchmeier 2002 on Cunegund's donations to the church after the death of Henry.
- 7 The story is repeated in Gregory's *Liber in gloria confessorum*, although the lovers remain nameless, and there the husband says at his wife's burial: 'Gratias tibi, rerum omnium artifex, ago, quod, sicut mihi eam commendare dignatus es, ita tibi reddidi ab omni voluptatis contagio inpollutam' (I thank you, maker of all things, that you have deemed me worthy to hand her back to you unsullied by any sensual pleasure). (*Monumenta Germaniae historica. Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum* 1885, 767).
- 8 According to the *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*, Henry says:

‘Recipite quam michi tradidistis virginem vestram’ (Receive what you handed to me, your virgin’) (*Monumenta Germaniae historica*, 7:659).

- 9 I use Theodore M. Andersson’s (1987, 68) designation ‘marital romance’ to refer to a narrative that ‘dealt not with the problem of acquiring a bride but with the problem of preserving the marital state.’
- 10 The translation is of chs. 4–7, 9–10 (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:42.16–48.11; 49.10–55.14).
- 11 The phrase *heimuglegt mak* also occurs in other legends in *Reykjahólabók*, in *Jóhannes saga gullmunns* (2:173.27) and in *Ósvalds saga* (1:79.14), where it has the same meaning as in *Hendreks saga*. Interestingly enough, the phrase *heimuglegt mak* alternates in *Hendreks saga* with *leyndarherbergi* (1:51.17), which in this case must be a loan translation.
- 12 The reference is to events recounted in chs. 2 and 3, that is, to Henry’s military expeditions against the Wends, Bohemians, and Poles.
- 13 I do not translate the Icelandic word *Saxland*, since it refers here to the entire German-language area, and not to Saxony.
- 14 The syntax in the Icelandic text is odd, containing a negative that makes no sense, but the intended meaning is clear: ‘Að því heldur munda ég ekki þetta, að ég villda heyra þetta orð af yður, en þér hefðuð gefið mér mörg kongaríki’ (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:47.33–48.1).
- 15 Ch. 8 is here omitted. It relates the many good works performed by Henry and Cunegund, such as the founding of the diocese of Bamberg and the building of the monastery of St Stephen.
- 16 There is no evidence for the existence of such a relic, but Klauser (1957) notes that there was an explosion of references to relics of Henry and Cunegund in the fifteenth century and that a good number of these must have been objects thought to have belonged to or to have been used by the imperial couple (129, also 139, 141).
- 17 On his deathbed, Henry calls Cunegund to his side and then says to his retainers: ‘See here, dearest friends, my bride whom

you obtained for me inviolate, I now return her to God and to you pure and inviolate in every way' (*Reykjahólabók*, 1:59.28–30).

Better Off Dead: Approaches to Medieval Miracles

MARGARET CORMACK

Most readers can come to grips with a saint's life (*vita*) fairly easily; it is, after all, related to familiar genres – biography, folklore, even romance – with which they are familiar. More difficult to comprehend are the accounts of miracles attributed to the saint, which may be sprinkled throughout the text or collected in a separate section at the end. These accounts form an essential part of hagiography; they illustrate the saint's special status, his or her ability to intercede with God, and may serve to advertise the power accessible at a particular shrine.¹ Modern readers unwilling to accept supernatural intervention as an aspect of daily life are often quite uncomfortable with this material, and explain such narratives in a number of ways – pure chance, exaggeration of the severity of an illness or the rapidity of a cure, psychosis, literary borrowing, or outright invention. There is a common tendency among many readers to try and reconstruct 'what really happened' in terms acceptable to a modern scientific world view. To my mind such questions are, ultimately, futile. One of the purposes of this study is to encourage readers to examine the social and literary contexts of 'miraculous' stories in order to find out what their authors are trying to tell us, and what the narratives themselves can tell us about the authors' lives and beliefs. Consistent with the medieval world view, I will refer to these narratives simply as 'miracles,' that is, exceptional, unexpected events, usually providing a solution to some basic human problem.² Let us examine a passage from an Icelandic saga composed in the middle of the fourteenth century with the aim of establishing the sanctity of Guðmundr Arason, who had been bishop of Hólar from 1203 to 1237.

(1) A poor woman was called Arnbjörg. She was in the district called Fljótshverfi in the diocese of Skálholt. She was pregnant with a child, and was expected to give birth within a few weeks. She did not give birth that fall, and during the winter her condition continued unchanged through Christmas and until Lent. She invoked the aid of the mother of all mercy, the Virgin Mary, and her noble friend, Bishop Guðmundr the Good, with

continuous clamour, and every night she kept water from the spring he blessed near her bed. At this time she was suffering such great distress on account of her bulk and pains of various sorts that she could not stand upright or walk in any other way than by dragging herself forward with two sticks. She vowed many small things to the Virgin Mary and Bishop Guðmundr the Good. She suffered that torment continually until the feast of St Mary in Lent [the Annunciation, 25 March], which fell on Maundy Thursday. And that day, when the sun was in the southeast, the farmer said that he wanted to attend the noon office, and she begged him with tears that he would take her to the chapel that was on the farm; he did so, and put a coverlet under her before the altar. She was unable to lie otherwise than on her back, or even turn to one side or the other. Then she lamented her sufferings sorely and prayed to God, tasting the water of Guðmundr the Good, and then fell into a sort of doze. A compassionate old blind woman was with her, and no one else. At that time there was so much snow on the ground that people could barely get from one farm to another. When it seemed to Arnbjörg that she had fallen asleep, the entire building filled with light; the old woman felt as if bright fire was carried before her eye sockets, and she held up both hands before them, but Arnbjörg saw a virgin standing by her, and a man dressed like a cleric. The virgin spoke to him: 'Sit at her shoulders, Bishop Guðmundr, while I do my work.' Then that blessed blossom laid her holy hands on her sick womb, and squeezed so hard that she thought she suffered great pain as a result, and at once gave birth to a child. The queen of heaven and earth said the following:

'You have given birth to a boy and I am taking him away with me, and if anyone doubts that you have received this mercy, then tell them something that has not yet happened, that on account of my arrival this snow will vanish so quickly, with gentle wind and warmth of the sun, that all the livestock will have enough grazing land on Easter Day.' And so it happened. 'I want you to do three things: fast on bread and water before this feast of mine for the rest of your life, and every day you live, recite the angelic greeting 'Ave Maria' seven times as long as you live. I forbid you to take an unlawful man from now on, but not to marry.' Arnbjörg answered so loudly that the old woman heard it: 'Gladly shall I do so, my blessed Mary!' Then she awoke, slender in girth, and completely cured; and when people came to her, and touched her, they found her clothes bloody, and a child's afterbirth, as

might be expected. All who saw and heard praised God and God's mother Mary and Bishop Guðmundr the Good.'³ (*Biskupa sögur* [1878], 166–8)

This narrative immediately engages the reader's imagination. What really happened? Are we dealing with an abortion, a false pregnancy, or an abducted or murdered child? Before beginning such a debate, however, the reader needs to be aware of one additional fact: this miracle does not stand alone – it is only one of six Icelandic narratives with a similar theme, all of which appear to date from the first half of the fourteenth century. The basic story line – one or more saints delivering a woman and leaving her 'cured' of her pregnancy but without a child – recurs in a second example from *Guðmundar saga biskups*, one from *Þorláks saga*, and three more in an Icelandic 'appendix' to a collection of Marian miracles (see introduction to *Maríu saga* below.) The problem could thus become a puzzle for a textual scholar: to reconstruct the 'original' form of the story. A quick comparison reveals that the stories in *Maríu saga* are variants of those found in the sagas of the two Icelandic bishops. Gert Kreuzer (1987, 123–7) has made a detailed comparison of the episode translated above with the corresponding one in *Maríu saga* (nr. 8 below), but comes to no conclusion as to which is original. The main difference among the various texts is the question of whether a baby is explicitly mentioned. Depending on what we decide is the 'original' version, we may have a story of an abduction/infanticide/stillborn child or of an abortion/misdiagnosis/false pregnancy. We might try to decide among these possibilities by enquiring in which direction exaggeration is likely to occur, that is, which would be perceived as more miraculous – a childbirth in which the baby is removed but all the signs of birth are present, or a woman 'cured' without even the need to clean up afterwards?

One additional possibility should be considered: the motif need not be Icelandic at all, but rather borrowed from a foreign source. For some, the discovery of such a source would solve the problem, and the Icelandic variants would be of no further interest. I would disagree with this assessment, because the mere presence of a certain miracle type tells us something about its authors and audience. Before deciding what it tells us, however, it is necessary to examine the various components of the story – including the proposed 'solutions' – as they appear elsewhere in miracle literature. Wherever possible I have used narratives set in Iceland, for the most part from the sagas (translated *vitae*) of native saints, as these will reflect the society in which the miracles under discussion took root. Non-Icelandic miracles

can, however, occasionally provide interesting parallels. Those found in *Maríu saga* – a vernacular life of the Virgin followed by translations of miracle collections – are extremely important.⁴ The Marian material (with the exception of the Icelandic examples discussed below) was known throughout Europe, in both Latin and vernacular versions, and exists in many Icelandic manuscripts. Thus, the very manuscript in which the translated miracles are found also provides evidence of related stories known in Iceland.

The Medical Condition

Pregnancy and childbirth are dangerous times for women and common occasions for calling on saints. In fact, one of the earliest Icelandic miracle texts (c. 1200) considers such vows by women to be the norm; it is a cause for scornful comment that a *man* should call on St Þorlákr ‘like weak women before they gave birth’⁵ (*Biskupa sögur II* [2002], 114). The native Icelandic corpus contains other examples of saints being called on both for successful childbirth and for baptism of an apparently dead child, both situations regularly found in miracle collections throughout medieval Europe.⁶

In the present instance, the question may be asked whether the woman was pregnant at all. Were Icelanders so medically naive that they confused some other condition with pregnancy, or took the word of a delusional woman who had the external symptoms of that condition? There are plenty of miracles in both the European and Icelandic corpus in which an individual swells up and looks pregnant, but is not identified as being in that state. A woman with a tumour that causes her stomach to swell up is miraculously cured at the tomb of Vilhelm of Æbleholt; as in one example below, her measurement is given⁷ (*Vitae sanctorum Danorum*, 349–50). How she is diagnosed as having a tumour is unknown; the only description we have is the size of her stomach. In another sort of miracle found in the Icelandic material, people are said to swell up as a result of swallowing worms, often in a drink of water. For example, a woman swallows a worm which causes her to swell so that she looks as if she was carrying twins; her condition lasts for three years, and is eventually cured by drinking water in which the bones of Guðmundr had been dipped (*Biskupa sögur* [1878], 173–4).

Could the story be describing a miscarriage or abortion? Irish saints occasionally perform such acts, as in the following account from a life of Brigid from the seventh century:

With a strength of faith most powerful and ineffable, [Brigid] blessed a woman who, after a vow of virginity, had lapsed through weakness into youthful concupiscence, as a result of which her womb had begun to swell with pregnancy. In consequence, what had been conceived in the womb disappeared and [Brigid] restored her to health and to penitence without childbirth or pain. (*Life of St Brigid*, 16)⁸

It is worth noting that in this case, as well as the Icelandic ones, the woman is 'restored to health' – pregnancy is classified as illness.

The Irish pregnancies are said to have been ended before birth. In contrast, the Icelandic story emphasizes the length of the pregnancy, followed by childbirth, rather than its sudden cessation. The purported length of the pregnancy also argues against proposing a connection with the Norwegian practice of 'burying' miscarried fetuses in church walls, attested to until quite recently.⁹ Small boxes claimed by folklore to have contained such fetuses have been recovered, though their size, and the absence (in most cases) of skeletal remains suggest that the pregnancy ended within the first trimester. And if the situation was simply that of an unviable fetus, the story is unnecessarily complex; miracles in which the saint saves a woman's life by expelling such a fetus also exist.¹⁰

There is thus plenty of potential for miracles in the other situations that might be posited as explanations for the Icelandic narratives.¹¹ One of the striking features of these stories is the length of the pregnancy the women must undergo. Lengthy pregnancy followed by the miraculous birth of a live child is attested in the miracle literature as early as the second half of the fourth century BCE, as seen in this testimony attributed to Apollo and Asclepius:

Cleo was with child for five years. After she had been pregnant for five years she came as a suppliant to the god and slept in the Abaton. As soon as she left it and got outside the temple precincts she bore a son who, immediately after his birth, washed himself at the fountain and walked about with his mother. In return for this favour she inscribed on her offering: 'Admirable is not the greatness of the tablet, but the Divinity, in that Cleo carried the burden in her womb for five years, until she slept in the Temple and He made her sound.' (*Asclepius*, 221, 229)¹²

An account with a less happy outcome is described in *Völsunga saga*, when a six-year pregnancy ends with a Caesarian section at the mother's request. Here, too, it appears that the child is considered to have developed inside the womb in the same way as if it had actually been born. 'The child was a boy, and he was already well grown when born, as was to be expected. It is said that the boy kissed his mother before she died' (*Völsungasaga* 1990, 37). This is undoubtedly an extreme example of the idea that the future status of a hero may be prefigured by a birth that is especially difficult for his mother (Kreutzer 1987, 122). In the medieval ecclesiastical context, a miracle in the Marian corpus describes a woman who has been with child thirty months longer than usual. As a result of prayers to the Virgin, her navel opens 'without human art' enabling doctors to remove the putrid corpse of the fetus (*Maríu saga*, 279–80; cf. 625–6, 1196). Another woman gives birth to three stones and a child (*Maríu saga*, 673). A pregnant woman thought to have died is buried, but when a child is heard weeping the grave is opened and mother and child are discovered to be alive (*Maríu saga*, 1041–2). Closer to home, an Icelandic annal entry from 1405 (no. 2 below) reports a story from Norway about a drowned pregnant woman who gave birth as she was being buried; the child lived long enough to be baptized. This account may not be as bizarre as it first appears: excavations at Æbleholt, for example, where St Vilhelm had quite a reputation for cures, have yielded skeletons of mothers and children that appear to have been posthumously expelled (Sellevold 1989, 89–91). The wish for a sign of life that would permit baptism of a stillborn child is amply attested in French chapels of *répît*, where such babies were taken to the shrines of the Virgin Mary or other saints in the hope of such a sign¹³ (Gélis 1981, Saintyves 1911, Vloberg 1960). The earliest recordings of these miracles are from the fifteenth century.

Literary and Historical Parallels

An account from twelfth-century England is much closer to the Icelandic examples. The story of the nun of Watton is especially striking because it is assumed to have an historical event at its core. When a nun who has become pregnant is imprisoned and chained up in her convent, a male saint accompanied by two beautiful women appears in a vision and removes the child, leaving the guilty nun restored to her girlish appearance with no sign that a birth had taken place.¹⁴ These features are paralleled in some of the Icelandic

versions, and it is worth noting that the figure in question – Henry of Sempringham – may have been, like Guðmundr Arason, a protosaint in need of miracles.

There is no evidence that this account reached Iceland, however. One story which was known (no. 5 below) is that of the pregnant abbess. This story was a very popular and widespread part of the Marian corpus.¹⁵ The abbess is miraculously delivered by the Virgin Mary, who hands the child over to two angels who deliver it to a hermit to be brought up (*Maríu saga*, 121–6; cf. 900–4).¹⁶ It is worth noting that this was considered a new and unusual type of miracle by William of Malmesbury, writing c. 1140¹⁷ (Constable 1978, 214). These non-Icelandic examples deal with nuns, for whom such a lapse was far more serious than it would have been for a laywoman in Iceland, where unwed motherhood does not seem to have been judged particularly seriously.¹⁸

The Icelandic Miracles: Time and Place

Although theologians would point out that the saints could hear the prayers of the faithful regardless of date or location, people travelled to the shrine of a saint, especially on feast days, in the hope that the special sanctity of the time and place would work in their favour. The suppliant would want to be as close to the relic or altar as possible, perhaps holding vigil the night before the feast. It is thus quite common to find miracles recorded at major shrines where the relics of the saints were credited with cures; Iceland has its share of such accounts from the cathedrals of Skálholt and Hólar, which contained the relics of St Þorlákr and St Jón, respectively. However, a visit to these shrines was probably not within the financial means of most Icelanders, and there are stories of visions and cures at churches not known to possess relics of the saints invoked. This includes some of the examples below, and also two cures by St Cecilia at Húsafell associated with her feast (*Heilagra manna sögur*, 1:294–7). In a scenario reminiscent of no. 1 above, a man who is too weak to move (apparently suffering from starvation) is cured shortly after Easter by a saint when left in church after matins while the rest of the congregation returns to the farmhouse between services (*Magnus saga* 1987, 41–3).¹⁹ In the childbirth miracle, Mass is being held at church; the best that can be done for a woman with impaired mobility is to leave her in front of the altar of the chapel on the farm.

In all but one of the following examples, the saints relieve their

suppliants at dates close to their feasts in the liturgical calendar; the one apparent exception is no. 7, the miracle that took place on the Eve of St Olaf's Feast (29 July). This is, however, only two weeks before the Assumption, a major Marian feast. Calling on saints on their feast days may have been a strategy, rather than a requirement, and it is possible that simply being in a church or chapel on any feast was sufficient. In Iceland, where travel to a shrine was difficult, the feast day may have gained in importance because it allowed people to focus on a time, rather than a place, where the saint would be accessible.

In the narrative in *Magnus saga* as well as nos 1 and 8, the coincidence of the miracles with the major Christian feast of death and resurrection is hardly likely to be coincidence. Nor is snow at Easter unlikely in Iceland. However, the function of the snow in the story – as indeed in a number of other weather-changing miracles in the Icelandic corpus – is not to provide proof that no one entered (or left) the chapel, but rather to prove the truth of a vision.

Unwanted and Unbaptized Babies

Especially in the miracles in which a child is explicitly said to have been delivered (nos 1 and 8), the 'real life' explanation that immediately springs to mind is infanticide. Infant exposure was undoubtedly practised in Iceland in the pagan period; we are told that at the adoption of Christianity in the year 1000 consumption of horsemeat and infant exposure continued to be permitted, although this situation did not last long.²⁰ The earliest extant version of the Icelandic Christian Law, from c. 1122–33, prescribes that every child, no matter how deformed, must be baptized (*Grágás*, 23). It is generally assumed that a baptized child would automatically be brought up, but it is worth noting that several Norwegian law codes, which appear to predate the Icelandic one by about a century, allow for severely deformed children to be taken to a church, baptized or primsigned, and then disposed of in one way or another.²¹ It is not until the second half of the thirteenth century, with the reforms of King Magnus *Lagabætir*, that laws in both countries explicitly state that every child with a human head is to be brought up, not just baptized (*Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, 2:293; 5:19–20).

Accounts of infant exposure are found in sagas dealing with the pagan past, although it should be pointed out that these episodes are literary devices used to focus attention on the child, who invariably survives to play a major role in the saga. For medieval (and later)

Icelandic Christians, infanticide was condemned not simply as murder, but because of the assumption (explicitly addressed in the law codes quoted above) that such a child might not be baptized. Lack of baptism was damaging not only for the soul of the child, shut out forever from the joys of heaven, but also because of the possibility that hauntings might occur as a result. Because unbaptized babies were denied burial in consecrated ground, their bodies could be taken over by demons. A graphic description of such a haunting, by a demon named 'Selkolla' for its seal's head, might have been a more serious deterrent than a sermon about the fate of the child's soul (*Biskupa sögur* 1858, 604–8). The child in the Selkolla story, however, died by accident, not as a result of intentional exposure. The lessons in that narrative concern the importance of baptism and the dangers of casual sex (on the part of the pair charged with the child, which, as a result of their indulgence, dies before they reach a priest). In fact, this example brings into focus a striking contrast between the medieval miracle corpus, with no explicit accounts of infant exposure, and post-Reformation folklore in which hauntings by *útburðir* (the ghosts of exposed infants) are common. Medieval clerics were certainly capable of producing such stories, if the problem had been considered a critical one. Possibly fear of hauntings like that of Selkolla was a sufficient deterrent that infant exposure actually occurred less frequently in the Middle Ages than after the Reformation. On the other hand, the Lutheran moral and legal system was considerably harsher towards unwed mothers than the Catholic one had been. This change in attitude on the part of the authorities may have caused an increase both in infant exposure and in folktales warning against the practice. In the Middle Ages, the diocese of Skálholt actually eased the rules regarding unbaptized children, who could now be buried in the vicinity of a church. Bishop Árni Þorláksson (1269–98) 'ordered that those children which did not receive baptism should be buried outside the churchyard, but formerly they were buried far from consecrated places like outlaws, and ignorant people called them *útburðir*' (*Árna saga biskups*, ch. xiv., in *Biskupa sögur III*, 23).

I hope the above discussion has served to contextualize the miracles under consideration here, and to emphasize the difficulty of finding a single, neat, explanation for their origin. Let us instead examine the message they convey to their audience. Obviously, all the miracles redound to the fame of the participating saints. In some cases, prayers may be required; the Virgin in particular requires specific prayers to be recited in her honour. In other examples it is necessary to report the miracle to an appropriate authority – this would be especially important in the case of a saint who has yet to be canonized, like Guðmundr. The fact that miracle no. 3 below was said to have been

sworn to before the *officialis* at Hólar would have given it added weight. The presence of ‘witnesses’ – the old woman who senses the presence of the Virgin (no. 1), and the priest who hears the woman’s response (no. 7) – serves to increase a tale’s credibility. In several, but not all, of the accounts the woman’s sexual morality is called into question, and observance of a better level of behaviour in future is imposed.

These stories appear to provide a solution to a perennial problem – that of unwanted offspring. It is striking that in the entire corpus of native Icelandic miracles there are no prayers begging for children. Fourteenth-century Iceland was a fairly marginal human habitat, in which children were definitely a burden to the poor. In fact, there is a certain amount of evidence that children were often *not* wanted. We are told of a man who brings up a crippled girl related to him whose parents have abandoned her (*Biskupa sögur* (1858), 361), and of a woman accused of doing away with the children she is looking after (*Biskupa sögur* (1858), 364). Since I do not want this paper to be taken as supporting Philippe Ariès’s (1962) claims about medieval people’s casual attitudes towards children, I should point out that there are also numerous, often quite harrowing, miracles which show parents deeply concerned for the health of their offspring.

However, the thought of yet another dependent might well have been daunting to unattached women, as the heroines of these stories all seem to be. This attitude is reflected in a miracle of St Þorlákr’s that in many ways echoes those I have been discussing. Þorlákr appears to a sick (but apparently not pregnant) woman and says: ‘I am Bishop Þorlákr whom you have long called on, and I have now received health for you from God, and you benefited most from the fact that you *helped your child*, but otherwise it would have been a mockery. Now God repays you doubly; *he took the child to himself* and gave you your health’ (*Biskupa sögur* (1858), 366–7; italics mine). In fourteenth-century Iceland, divine intervention took the form of relieving women from unwanted children rather than sending longed-for offspring. And if they were safe in the care of God or the Virgin Mary, baptism could no longer be an issue.

It is of course impossible for us ever to know whether the Icelandic stories reflect events that actually took place, or the literary efforts of a scribe who ‘naturalized’ the story of the sinning abbess – or perhaps that of the nun of Watton – by applying it to laywomen and relocating it in the Icelandic countryside. Whatever its ultimate origin, it is striking that six different versions of the story were recorded within the space of half a century: its message must have had a certain appeal. And I suspect that its appeal resided in its answer to the wish of many pregnant women – restored health without the responsibility

of another mouth to feed.

Translations

Note on the translations: vocabulary pertaining to pregnancy and childbirth: Many Icelandic terms for pregnancy simply mean ‘sick,’ for example, *vanheil* (lit. ‘lacking in health’), *óheil* (lit. ‘not healthy’) etc. A woman who has given birth is once again *heil* i.e., ‘healthy’ or ‘cured.’ Terminology can also refer to the woman’s weight (or lack of it); a woman made pregnant is *óunguð*, *þlétt* (‘heavy,’ ‘not light’); when she gives birth she ‘becomes lighter’ – *verður léttari*. I have generally simply translated such terms as appropriate to the situation, i.e., pregnancy and childbirth. However, when the author appears to be emphasizing the double meaning of the word, I have provided both possibilities, e.g., ‘sick/heavy.’

Selections, Icelandic Miracles

A Post-Mortem Birth

(2) Eight people from a ship drowned in Lake Mjørs [Mjøsen, Norway]. Among them was a woman called Sigríður who was pregnant. She was found on the third day after she drowned, and taken to church. On the fourth day she was prepared for burial. And at the edge of the grave, people noticed that the shroud around her was moving. It was ripped open and a newborn child was found there, weeping. The child was baptized by the priest and died immediately and was buried there with its mother.

(*Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, 186 *sub anno* 1405. The annal was compiled in the latter part of the sixteenth century.)

Guðmundar saga buskups by Arngrímur Brandsson

(3) A woman was called Þorný, who was thought to carry a living child, which was expected to be born towards summer,²² but at Christmas the winter before that, she began to bleed, and continued to

do so every three weeks until the feast of St Þorlákr [23 December] the following winter, and then she called on St Þorlákr, and it seemed she only got worse/heavier as a result of her vow. On Candlemas [the feast of the Purification of Mary, 2 February] she called on Our Lady, with the same result. On the first Friday in Lent she measured herself, and it took three ells and a handsbreath around her; nothing changed until the commemoration of Guðmundr²³ [16 March], and the day before it she took to her bed with horrible sickness and burning grief of her misery. She then begins her clamour to God, especially for the intercession of Guðmundr the Good, and promises to walk to Hólar the next three winters and offer an ounce of wax, and to have three requiem masses sung for the souls of his father and mother,²⁴ and then she falls asleep. It then appeared to her that a man in a blue-black cape stood by her bed and gazed at her for a time, and then said: 'Don't be in doubt that I am Bishop Guðmundr, and fulfil your vow well, and do not conceal the mercy that you receive.' Then he put his right arm around her chest and his left under her shoulders, and squeezed her entire body down to the knees; his grip felt good, but nonetheless very painful, resembling most closely the pains of a woman who gives birth with the shortest labour; and after that she lay as if senseless from weakness, and did not know how the man disappeared or departed. In the morning, when she awoke, she was completely cured, and so slim that it didn't take more than an ell and a span to go round her; in addition, she had had a boil under her arm, which was completely healed, and all her limbs were so supple and soft, as if she had never had this sort of ailment, except for her legs below her knees; they were very stiff, because his blessed touch had not reached them. In addition to this, when people approached her they realized that all her clothes were dry and unspotted, as of a healthy woman. She swore to this miracle before reverend Þorsteinn, the *officialis* at Hólar, and all good people know this miracle to be true. And it is not to be doubted that this blessed bishop shines sublimely exalted in the hall of heaven on an equal footing with other holy bishops. (*Guðmundar saga biskups*, 1878, 168–9; mid-fourteenth century)

Þorláks saga (late thirteenth – early fourteenth century)

(4) A woman was called Jódís, who had been excommunicated by Bishop Þorlákr for a time; after that she was reconciled²⁵ with him, and departed from the relationship²⁶ that he had been concerned about. Soon thereafter another man became fond of her, and she became pregnant by him; and when she was expected to give birth, he deserted her, and she travelled around miserably and on many occasions was near to death on account of her pregnancy. Eventually

she came to a woman of high standing called Guðný, and there she took to bed; she expected neither health/delivery nor a long life. But Bishop Þorlákr appeared to her in her sleep and strengthened her, saying that he would visit her repeatedly; and when a week had passed he appeared to her a second time, and advised her to keep vigil in church before his feast day, and said that he would come to her again on that occasion. And when that night came, she was carried into church, and laid down before the steps to the choir, with a skin under her; there was a fifteen-year-old girl with her to look after her. And in the middle of the night she had dozed off. She saw the blessed Bishop Þorlákr go into the church and to the altar, and he took from it the bag that contained earth from his grave; then he went to her and sprinkled the earth over her, but did not say anything, as far as she could hear, and then vanished from sight. And when [Jódís] awoke, she was completely cured and it could not be seen otherwise than that a healthy person had lain there. She was also so thin and slim that she did not need more around her than an ell and a half, where previously it had required four and a half ells, and this miracle was known to everyone. (*Biskupa sögur* 1858, 375)

Maríu saga

(AM 234 fol., c. 1325, or c. 1340 according to Widding 1996.) The last five miracles in this manuscript are found in no other Icelandic collection of Marian miracles. The first of them, no. 52 in Unger's edition, is the story of a priest who drinks a spider with the Mass wine, and is said to have been related by Bishop Páll Jónsson (bishop of Skálholt 1195–1211) on the Feast of the Assumption. Miracle no. 53 is set in the vicinity of Santiago de Compostella (*út at Jakobs*, 'out at James's') and concerns a poor woman falsely accused of stealing a delicacy from a dish; the last three are translated below, after the story of the pregnant abbess as found in this manuscript.

Concerning an abbess (extracts from *Maríu Saga*)

(5) [A wise and well-born abbess who ruled her convent well and strictly was resented by arrogant nuns of noble birth. When she gets pregnant by her page the nuns rejoice and send for the bishop. The abbess casts herself on the mercy of the Virgin]:

After weeping for a long time and heart-rending prayers she fell asleep. And in her doze blessed Mary appeared to her, and two angels accompanied her. She was gracious in appearance and spoke words of consolation to the abbess as follows: 'I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. Now I have obtained from my Son, the most

compassionate refuge of sinners, forgiveness for your sin, and because he has forgiven the sin, he will also remove from you the shameful slander that your enemies have against you.' Then Mary ordered the angels who accompanied her to receive/deliver the child that the abbess was carrying. Then she gave birth to a boy. Then Mary commanded the angels to take the boy to a hermit who was nearby, and said that he should bring him up until he was seven years old. He should then take the boy to the bishop of the place, and he should bring the boy up from then on and set him to books. The angels did as they were told, and everything went as Mary had predicted. Then Mary also said the following to the abbess: 'You are delivered from the shame that threatened you, and from all the disgrace that could have resulted from it, but you can still expect a reprimand from the bishop, and you shall take all this quietly and do not let it disturb you, because it will not harm you.' After this speech Mary vanished. And when the abbess awoke from sleep, she at once perceived that she was healthy and slim. Then she was extremely glad, and prostrated herself in prayer and thanked God and blessed Mary with tears for the mercy that had been granted her. Then she set herself to do what Mary had told her, and promised God once again that from that time forward she would keep faith and uprightness and holy customs in all things, as best she might.

At that moment the bishop, to whom the nuns had sent word, came to the convent, and went into the chapter house and asked where the abbess was, and ordered her called to him. She was found in her chapel and summoned to speak with the bishop. She went to the chapter house and seated herself in her place. Then the bishop began to upbraid her and spoke many hard words to her, according to his belief about her condition. Later he ordered her to depart. She remembered what Mary had commanded her, did not reply a single word to the bishop, and did not let herself be disturbed by what he said. Then he sent two clerks after her and ordered that they should examine her in order to determine clearly what her condition was. They investigated her and could not find otherwise than that she was healthy [i.e., not pregnant]. Then they told the bishop what they had discovered and said that she must be innocent of the accusation that was made against her. Then it occurred to the bishop that they might have been bribed to lie about her condition. He then went himself and examined her and confirmed truly that she was completely healthy. Then the bishop fell at her feet and begged her to forgive him for accusing her so much about something without cause. The abbess wondered greatly at the bishop's humility, and fell at his feet and said that she was unworthy that such a noble man bowed down before her. After that the bishop was so furious with the nuns who had slandered

her that he drove them away from the convent. She then thought that it was not really suitable that the sisters fared so badly, since they had not lied about her, although they had borne ill will towards her. She wanted rather to do something in honour of blessed Mary, who had saved her, and let the bishop know the entire affair, in all its details, and lay on the earth at his feet while she told him.

The bishop praised God and his blessed mother Mary for the mercy that she had shown the abbess. Then he sent two of his clerks to the hermit to know what the situation was there. He said that at the time the boy was born, two handsome young men came to him and brought the boy there, and said that Queen Mary sent the boy to him for fostering, and ordered that he should bring him up until he was seven years old, and then the bishop should receive him. The bishop let everything be as described above. The hermit brought up the boy, as had been ordained, and then the bishop received him and set him to books and trained him in good customs and morality. After the death of the bishop this man became bishop, and in his episcopate was a virtuous man and very devoted to blessed Mary as long as he lived. The abbess lived well in the convent from then on, and lived well and nobly all her life, until God demanded her soul. (*Maríu saga*, 1:121–6)

(6) We wish to gladly proclaim these events and performance of miracles by Our Lady Saint Mary in praise of God Almighty and his blessed Mother, who grants the greatest mercy to all those who approach her with love for intercession with almighty God. A pregnant woman called Arnbjörg held vigil in church the night before the Feast of St Brigid [1 February] on the farm called Kálfafell. Queen Mary appeared to her with light and fragrance and asked if she thought she was ill/pregnant. The woman answered and said she certainly thought so. ‘You will be healthy from now on,’ said the glorious Queen Mary, ‘and Bishop Nicholas and Bishop Þorlákr have obtained this for you.’²⁷ Then Blessed Mary put one hand around her belly and another around her loins and squeezed down her body, causing her pain, and then Mary vanished from sight and the woman awoke completely cured. (*Maríu saga*, 154–5)

(7) At the eminent estate called Svínafell this event took place during the night before the first Feast of St Olaf [29 July]. A woman called Ljóðey received a wonderful miracle there. Her condition was such that she was pregnant, and had been so for longer than the time when it could be expected that she would give birth. She was exceptionally fat, exceeding that which is usual. She fell asleep after coming from a bath, and then it appeared to her that a man of noble appearance wearing a black cope came to the bed where she lay. She thought that

the man in the cope was Bishop Guðmundr, and all at once a great light came over her, so bright that she could not at first distinguish anything but the light. The man in the cope said ‘Queen Mary has arrived.’ She went to the bed and said: ‘Are you poorly,²⁸ Ljóðey?’ ‘So it seems to me,’ she said. Then the blessed queen said: ‘We shall make an agreement, that you shall recover your health as a result of this meeting, but from now on you shall observe chastity as long as you live; you shall make a practice of fasting on Saturdays, and sing a third of the psalter every Saturday, and eat only one meal on Fridays.’ And she said furthermore: ‘You, Bishop Guðmundr, sit under her shoulders.’ The bishop took his place, and it seemed to her that he put one arm across her chest and another under her shoulders. Blessed Mary with her own hands squeezed her belly very hard, and it was extremely painful. And then Ljóðey said: ‘My belly is going to split apart, my blessed queen!’ The priest who lived there heard her speak these words. Then Mary said, before she vanished, ‘Ljóðey, be sure to carry out that which I have imposed upon you,²⁹ and tell the priest of the church this vision.’ She answered, with tears in her voice, ‘I’ll do that which you command, my blessed queen!’ The priest heard her speak these words. She woke up and at once perceived the change that had taken place in her condition, stood up at once completely cured, and told the priest as she had been commanded, and people went to church and praised almighty God and Lady St Mary. (*Maríu saga*, 155–6)

(8) At the ecclesiastical estate called Kirkjubær a woman called Þuríðr received a cure. She thought she was pregnant and that the fetus had quickened before Advent, and she was as fat as those women are who are carrying more than one child. She had been sickly all winter and had labour pains such as often lead to childbirth, and she had therefore not risen from her bed. The evening before Maundy Thursday she was as bad/heavy as when she was at her worst/heaviest. It so happened that when this event occurred the Feast of Mary [the Annunciation, 25 March] fell on Good Friday, and during the night when people went to the office, it wasn’t considered possible for her to go out, and a woman was appointed to stay with her. She did not fall asleep before they returned from the service and the lights were put out. Sooner than could be expected it appeared to her that a light appeared in the bed-closet, and it seemed to her that she recognized Queen Mary in the light, with a wonderful fragrance that she smelled, and then she saw that Bishop Guðmundr was also there. Then it seemed to her that Lady St Mary began to speak: ‘Do you feel in a bad way?’ Þuríðr agreed it was so. ‘Will you make an agreement

with me,' said the blessed queen, 'that I give you health, and you carry out that which I command you?' 'Gladly,' she said. 'It is to fast on Saturdays and sing a third of the psalter on each of them, as long as you live, and fast before all Marian feasts, and three days before the earlier Feast of Mary [the Assumption, 15 August] and live chastely from now on.' She gladly agreed to this. 'You, Bishop Guðmundr, support her under her shoulders.' And it seemed to her that the queen squeezed down around her belly and that it hurt. She thought she observed that a child came from her and was wrapped in a linen cloth. And Lady Saint Mary appeared to her to be in shining white clothes with a short red mantle on her shoulders. Then the queen spoke: 'Now I will take my little girl with me. You tell your priest this miracle/event.' Then they vanished from sight, and no marks were seen on her clothes. She awoke completely cured and at once went rejoicing to tell the priest, and was so overwhelmed that at first she was hardly able to speak a word. She was also as slim and as quick on her feet as a healthy person. For the remainder of the fast she behaved like those who were perfectly healthy [i.e., she observed the fast]. May that same mother of mercy, Lady Saint Mary, obtain for us eternal salvation from her almighty son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns one God through all the ages [*sæcula sæculorum*]. (*Maríu saga*, 156–7)

NOTES

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1 A detailed study of the Icelandic miracles corpus is that of

Diana Whaley (1994).

- 2 In the Middle Ages a ‘miracle’ was not necessarily an event that took place contrary to the laws of nature. See Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*. Icelandic terms for miracles are *atburður* (event, occurrence) and *jartegn* (sign, token).
- 3 From *Guðmundar saga biskups* by Arngrímr Brandsson of the monastery at Þingeyrar (d. 1361 or 1362).
- 4 The most recent analysis of the Icelandic Marian miracles is found in Widding (1996).
- 5 This text is probably to be dated shortly after 1200. It is striking that the man in question has swollen up so that he is ‘as fat as an ox.’
- 6 For Icelandic examples, see *Biskupa sögur I* (2003), 292; *Biskupa sögur* (1858), 368–9; *Biskupa sögur III* (1998), 221. By ‘native Icelandic corpus’ I mean the miracles recorded in the lives of the three Icelandic holy men, Þorlákur Þórhallson, Jón Ögmundarson, and Guðmundr Arason, as well as other scattered examples of miracles set or recorded in Iceland. The designation is not intended to imply that they are uniquely Icelandic or that they are in some sense ‘genuine’; many are clearly modelled on foreign exemplars.
- 7 Vilhelm’s miracles are from the thirteenth century.
- 8 For another story in which ingestion of a worm results in a condition resembling pregnancy and a saint is invoked at a critical moment see *Morkinskinna* 1932, 195– 8. This, too, represents a motif attested to outside Iceland. For a swallowed fish as the cause of actual pregnancy; see *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*, 50–1. In fact, an Icelandic collection of cures presents remedies for poison or swallowed spiders alongside of those for childbirth or the expulsion of a dead fetus (*Læknisfræði*, 74, 76). *Læknisfræði* is the earliest exemplar of a text derived from Henrik Harpestreng’s book of remedies written in the thirteenth century, itself based on the *Macer Floridis*, a Latin poem dated c. 1100.
- 9 To my knowledge there are two other Irish examples, both of which involve nuns. In the life of St Ciaran of Saigir, a young woman has been carried off by a local nobleman, but a miracle of the saint causes her to be returned, and her pregnancy to

vanish: ‘Videns autem vir Dei quod vterus illius femine partu intumescebat [uiperium semen animari nolens, S, R], signo sancte crucis benedixit vvlum illius, et uenter eius exinde decreuit, et partus in vtero euauit’ (*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* 1910, 1:221). St Cainnech relieves a virgin who has fornicated, at her request: ‘Quedam virgo in vicino sibi loco habitans occulte fonicavit, et uterus eius partu intumuit. Que a sancto Kannecho postulavit ut uterum suum, quasi aliquo dolore tumescentem, benediceret. Cumque ille benedixisset eam, statim infans in utero eius non apparens evanuit’ (*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex Codice Olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi* 1965, 197). I thank Maeve Callan for these references.

- 10 See Olsen 1957, 173–81; Bø 1960. Olsen treats beliefs still extant at the time he wrote; Bø discusses Norwegian and Swedish folk traditions and practices concerning the disposal of miscarried or stillborn children within the church or graveyard, as well as the belief that dolls could be treated in this way to ‘trick death’ and cure a sick child. What cannot be determined based on the present evidence is whether the practice was current in the Middle Ages, or developed after the Reformation.
- 11 See *Maríu saga*, 279–80 (cf. *The Miracles of Our Lady of Rocamadour*, 164–5) and *Vitae sanctorvm Danorvm*, 347–8.
- 12 While the cause of Cleo’s predicament is not stated, the next account in the collection attributes a similar problem to carelessness in wording a prayer. A woman who prays to Asclepius for pregnancy but not for birth carries her child for three years until she returns to the shrine and corrects the omission.
- 13 These are to be distinguished from resuscitation/baptism miracles, which take place at the location where the child is born.
- 14 Translated in Boswell 1988, 452–8, and by Jo Ann McNamara (‘The Nun of Watton’ 1995). The episode is discussed by Constable 1978.
- 15 It is to this story, rather than to the more general type I am discussing, that Boswell (1988, 372–3) refers. (Quoted in Jochens 1995, 209, note 134).

- 16 Boswell 1988 translates a version of the story on 459–60.
- 17 William summarizes the miracle by stating that the abbess gave birth in her sleep. Constable notes that the earliest example of the Pregnant Abbess story is probably from the 1120s.
- 18 cf. *Þorláks saga* in *Biskupa saga II* (2002), 169 (*Boejar-Högna mál*). The situation described in this episode became serious only when parents were discovered to be related within the degrees prohibited by the church. This seems also to be the concern in no. 4 below. While the distinctions drawn by the church between women who bore children in and out of wedlock mentioned in Jochens (1995, 41) were certainly attempts to discourage illegitimate births, there is no evidence that they were particularly effective.
- 19 The precise date of the miracle is unknown, but the feast of St Magnus is 16 April, a date which could coincide with the end of the Easter season and account for the appearance of this saint. The story is set ‘north in Kelduhverfi.’
- 20 Cf. *Íslendingabók* 17. Although the text that specifically connects the two provisions by stating that it would not be possible to bring up all the children that were born if horsemeat, the poor man’s food, were forbidden, dates from the late thirteenth century (cf. *Flateyjarbók* 1860–88, 1:446), it seems reasonable to assume that the statement correctly assesses the reason for the retention of these provisions. The term ‘infant exposure’ reflects the Icelandic *bera út*, i.e. to ‘carry out’ and it is generally assumed that living children were abandoned, as narrated in several sagas. Recently Else Mundal (1989, 129–32) has raised the question of whether the abandoned infants were in fact slain, so that it was their corpses that were carried out. Most scholars reject Boswell’s (1988) claim that the intent was that the children should be found; in the societies under consideration here, such an accidental rescue would be extremely unlikely.
- 21 *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, 1:12, 376, 395. In *ibid.* 1:339, 363 the most severely deformed babies are not even baptized.
- 22 According to the Icelandic calendar in use at this time, the first day of summer was the Thursday between 9 April and 15 April.

- 23 Arngrímr carefully refers to Guðmundr's 'day' rather than to his 'Mass' as in the case of the other two saints.
- 24 Since Guðmundr's parents were not married, they might be in need of prayers.
- 25 The term used, *sátta*, is precisely the same as would be used for the settlement of a secular dispute.
- 26 The word *mein* generally means something like 'harm' or 'damage' or 'illness' but can also be used for an impediment to a sexual relationship which is within the degrees forbidden by the church. This narrative uses it in both senses; first the *mein* (implying an illicit relationship) that Jódís abandons, and the *mein* that is her pregnancy. The idea of pregnancy and childbirth as illnesses was not invented by modern physicians; it is assumed in the vocabulary used to describe the conditions in medieval Scandinavian literature.
- 27 Both saints have feasts in December, and we could imagine that they, too, had been called on, without effect. Candlemas, a feast of the Virgin, is 2 February.
- 28 *pungliga* – the word reflects both physical heaviness and mental depression.
- 29 The phrase 'impose upon' (*leggja á*) is precisely that used of magical curses in *fornaldarsögur* and later folklore, but unlike those contexts, the implication is that the recipient has the option of not following the imposed duties (though presumably with bad results if they are ignored).

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